



LINGUISTIC CAPITAL AND CAREER AMBITION: THE MEDIATING EFFECT OF PERCEIVED SOCIAL MOBILITY ON ENGLISH PRESTIGE AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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Abstract

This study aimed to explore the links between English language prestige (ELP), perceived social mobility (PSM) and career aspirations in undergraduate students of selected public universities of Pakistan. A quantitative research design was used and the data was collected from 384 students using a structured questionnaire. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (i.e., Pearson correlation and multiple regression analyses). The results showed that student attitudes towards English are positive and they consider it to be a vital tool for social mobility and success in their future careers. There was a strong positive correlation between ELP and PSM. Moreover, PSM was a key predictor of career aspirations. Therefore, this study concludes that English plays an important role as a form of linguistic capital which is affecting students educational, social and career aspirations.

Keywords: *Career Aspirations, English Language Prestige, Linguistic Capital, Pakistani University Students, Perceived Social Mobility.*

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1. Introduction

Language is not just a tool for communication. It also provides a rich social resource that has an impact on the lives of individuals in terms of their educational and employment opportunities and their social status. Language in today's world is a capital that can lead to opportunities for personal growth and socioeconomic mobility. English is the language that has reached the peak of global importance among the world's languages and has become the primary language of global communications, higher education, science, technology and business. English proficiency, therefore, is often linked to prestige, employability and success in professional life, especially in developing and post-colonial societies where English still has a significant symbolic and material value (Abrar-ul-Hassan, 2021).

Language prestige plays a significant role in the language study, as languages are not valued equally in the society. Some languages enhance in prestige because of political, economic, institutional and historical processes. Prestige languages are associated with education, authority, intelligence and social influence, while less prestigious languages are marginalized even though they are important culturally. Due to its status in international trade, in the scientific and literary exchange, and in technological advancement, English has become one of the most respected languages in the world. Consequently, people see the competence in English as a way to access valuable educational and occupational opportunities (Jackson & Takahashi, 2026).

English has come to play an important role worldwide, making it a valuable linguistic capital. Linguistic capital is the value of language skill in a given social context and the benefits that people can get from possessing this language skill. In numerous countries, English is a tool which can be monetized for learning, employment and social status. According to Abrar-ul-Hassan (2021), the power of English as a language in higher education still exists and it provides access to highly reputed institutions and employment opportunities. As such, learning the English language has become an investment for future socio-economic development.

The context of Pakistan is especially relevant in this regard because the relationship between prestige of the English language and social mobility is a topic of interest here. The country enjoys high level of linguistic diversity which includes Urdu and other regional languages including Punjabi, Sindhi, Pashto, Balochi and Saraiki. In the context of this multi-lingual reality, English remains a privileged language in higher education, government institutions, the legal system and business. The majority of the population have a strong belief that English- medium education equips them for academic success and career growth opportunities. For this reason, the learning of English is seen by students and parents as a key to their upward social mobility and to their life opportunities (Abrar-ul-Hassan, 2021).

Globalization and economic change are positively related to the rising importance of English. The rising importance of English is closely related to globalization and economic change. Communication skills are becoming a growing requirement in global labour markets for participation in international networks and knowledge economies. English competence is frequently viewed by employers as a measure of competence, adaptability and employability. A common misconception among students is that learning English provides a greater opportunity for well-paying jobs and better professional standing (Alles, 2024). Such views facilitate the general perception that English serves as a vehicle to socioeconomic mobility and job success.

Over the past few years, there has been an increasing body of academic research on the topic of language and social mobility. Overall, the term social mobility is used to describe upward or downward mobility consisting of an increase or a decrease in educational level, occupational position, income and social status. Access to valuable skills and educational qualifications are often considered to be significant enablers of mobility. Globally, there is a strong body of evidence that education, career advice and skill development have a strong impact on their expectations for future socioeconomic mobility (OECD & Greiff, 2024). In this broader frame of reference, the language ability can be a crucial asset and may be a means of accessing opportunities or limiting access to opportunities.

English skills have been highlighted as a determinant of perceptions of social mobility in recent studies. High-English proficiency students may feel they have a better chance for educational success and better job prospects. English is becoming a tool of social mobility in modern societies as it is providing a better access to knowledge, professional networks and job opportunities in the world (Tulaboyevna & Sunnatillovovich, 2025). The results from this study reveal that the language skill could not only affect objective socioeconomic outcomes, but also one's self-perception of future prospects.

The notion of social mobility is of special significance for university students because it is a critical moment in their educational and professional development. University education can be a transitional period when students decide on their future career path and define themselves as professionals and consider their job prospects. They may have negative perceptions about the importance of English that can affect their educational choices, work planning and aspirations for social mobility. Students who value English as a valuable language and also an economically valuable language, may exhibit higher motivation to achieve higher education and career goals.

Students' future orientation is also reflected in their career aspirations. Career aspirations are what people hope to be and do in the future in regard to their careers. These dreams are shaped by a variety of factors such as socioeconomic status, experiences in

school, and opportunities perceived, and personal motivation. If there are strong associations between English and prestigious professions and higher income in societies, language attitudes can have a big impact on the expectations students may have about their career. According to Alles (2024), positive attitudes toward English were related to increased educational goals and positive views of career prospects among university students.

Studies of language attitudes have also been found to show that public attitudes to the social value of English affect their motivation and education behaviour. Jackson and Takahashi (2026) indicated that positive attitudes towards English tend to have a positive correlation with increased motivation in English learning and an increased awareness of English' instrumental value. Students who believe that English is vital to their academic and professional success might be more motivated to learn English and might have greater expectations for success in the future. These perceptions sustain the symbolic and practical status of English in the current societies.

The status of English in Pakistan has triggered many debates and discussions about the issue of educational equity and linguistic inequality. There is inequality in access to quality English-medium education between social classes and geographical areas. Students from privileged economic and social backgrounds often have higher opportunities to learn English, while students from disadvantaged backgrounds might face challenges in learning English. Therefore, English can be used by some as an instrument for social mobility, and also as a factor of social stratification. To analyze these larger questions of educational opportunity and social inequality, an understanding of student views of the prestige of English is necessary.

While previous studies examined language attitudes, English language learning, and educational aspirations, there is a lack of quantitative research that simultaneously examined the inter-relations between prestige and perceived social mobility of English language with career aspirations in the context of Pakistan. To date, these constructs have largely been studied separately and there has been a lack of research investigating the relationship between them. Moreover, research specific to university students in Pakistan is still limited in the context of increasing relevance of English in educational and professional contexts.

Considering the on-going relevance of English in the education and employability of Pakistanis, it is crucial to investigate the attitudes Pakistanis hold about the prestige of English and what impact these attitudes have on expectations of social mobility and career prospects. This type of investigation can help in sociolinguistic theory by adding to the body of knowledge on linguistic capital, language prestige and can also inform the practice of teachers, planners or policy makers. In this regard, the present study aims to use a quantitative research approach to examine the link between the prestige of English

language, perceived social mobility and career aspirations among the university students of Pakistan. The results will contribute to the knowledge of the sociolinguistic status of English in Pakistan in the present scenario and implications for educational and professional development.

1.1. Problem Statement

English is a prestigious language in Pakistan and is viewed as a language of educational, career and social success. In spite of its increased significance in the higher education system and the job market, there is little empirical research that has explored the concept of prestige of English among university students and how these perceptions affect their perception of social mobility and career goals. Existing research has been largely concerned with language attitudes, English language learning or educational outcomes separately, and the interdependence of the three variables (i.e., English language prestige, perceived social mobility and career aspirations) has received little attention, especially in Pakistan. It is therefore important to study if there is any relationship between the prestige attached to English and the student perceptions and career aspiration for social advancement. Filling this gap can help to raise awareness about the sociolinguistic nature of English and its impact on students academic and career aspirations. For this purpose, the present study seeks to answer following questions

1. What is the relationship between English language prestige and perceived social mobility among Pakistani university students?
2. What extent do English language prestige and perceived social mobility influence the career aspirations of Pakistani university students?

1.2. Delimitation of the Study

The present study has been restricted to the undergraduate students of three public sector universities (see 3.2) operating in Punjab, Pakistan. Three variables are addressed in the study: prestige of English language; perceived social mobility; and career aspirations. A quantitative method of research is used, and a structured questionnaire (Appendix 1) is used for data collection. Other sociolinguistic issues like English language proficiency, code switching, language policy, socioeconomic status, gender difference, attitudes towards the regional language have not been discussed in the study. Moreover, the results are specific to the selected universities and may not be generalized to the whole of the University students in Pakistan.

1.3. Limitations of the Study

The study may have a number of limitations. The first concerns with the use of self-reported questionnaire information is that the information may be socially desirable rather than reflecting the participants beliefs and perceptions. Second, the cross-sectional nature of the study makes it difficult to draw causal links between prestige of English, perceived social mobility and career aspirations. Thirdly, the study is limited to the

students of three universities (See 3.2) only and findings may not be representative of the students studying in other universities and educational settings of Pakistan. Lastly, the interpretation of the findings may be affected by individual differences that are not fully controlled in the study because of participants linguistic backgrounds, educational background and socioeconomic status.

2. Literature Review

2.1 English Language Prestige

Language prestige is the social worth and prestige of a language in a particular speech community. According to the sociolinguists, however, the evaluation of a language goes beyond the linguistic aspect, and languages gain prestige when they are associated with power, education, economic opportunities and social influence. Today English is the most celebrated, international language in its use for higher education, science, technology and business, and as the language of international communication. This has led to a common perception that a person's level of English proficiency is a measure of her/his educational status, professional qualifications and social standing.

It is the prestige of English that has been stressed by recent studies both in developed and developing countries. Jackdon and Takahashi (2026) report that students can sometimes connect English to being a 'citizen of the world', doing 'good' work, and advancing their careers. They found that a positive attitude to English was closely associated with the learners motivation and perceptions of future opportunities. Likewise, Alles (2024) in his study found that university students saw the value of learning English in a positive way for meeting their educational and career objectives. The results indicated that social value of English has a strong impact on students ambitions and future planning.

The prestige of English in Pakistan is unique in the context of its past in administration, education and governance. Urdu is the national language and regional languages are still thriving but English has taken the place of a key language in higher education, public administration and professional communication. Raza, Imran, Abid, and Nadeem (2025) stated that English was still perceived as a prestigious and modern language while Urdu was mainly perceived as a language of the nation and everyday communication. These views help to explain why so many people think it is crucial to be proficient in English for social and professional progress.

This is further corroborated by the study which was conducted on the university students of Pakistan. Rizwan, Nawaz, and Hassan (2026) concluded that students have in general a positive attitude towards English in terms of their perception of intelligence, social and successful position. English was seen by participants as a symbol of educational success and they felt that being proficient in English would improve a person's social status. The results of this study show that the prestige of English in Pakistan is deep-rooted in the Pakistani society and is having impact on students attitudes and aspirations.

2.2 English as Linguistic Capital

A concept of linguistic capital was introduced by Bourdieu (1968), who suggested that language is a symbol of capital that brings about social and economic benefits. Based on this view, it is expected that those with socially desirable linguistic skills will have greater access to learning opportunities, high status jobs and powerful social circles. Linguistic capital thus helps to create and perpetuate the social hierarchies and inequalities. This was furthered by Abrar-ul-Hassan (2021) who explored the use of English as linguistic capital in higher education. The study suggested that English has become an important tool that facilitates access to academic and professional opportunities. Students with good English-language proficiency tend to be better equipped to get admission and secure better employment opportunities. English as linguistic capital has gained a lot of significance in the globalized world. In today's global job market, communication abilities are becoming essential for engaging in transnational professional networks. As a result, the language skill of English is very marketable. Tulaboyevna and Sunnatilloevich (2025) concluded that English proficiency improves the ability of people to access educational resources, employment opportunities and access to international professional networks. They conclude that English has become a strategic resource that can shape long-term socioeconomic outcomes.

In Pakistan, English medium education is seen as a means to social mobility and economic success. Quality instruction in English is often linked with the top schools and well-paying jobs. This means that students and parents put a lot of effort into learning English. Qadri, Naper, and Jokhio (2025) noted that English is now being considered as a social capital which differentiates people in a competitive educational and occupational setting. This perception further reinforces the notion that control of English will enhance an individual's future prospects.

2.3 English Language Prestige and Social Mobility

Social mobility is the change in socioeconomic status that occurs when a person or group of people move up or down in status as a result of better or worse education, jobs, earning, and social status. The connection between language competence and social mobility has become an important focus for scholars, as they have increasingly suggested that language can be a pathway to access of valuable social resources and opportunities. According to the OECD and Greiff (2024), access to learning materials and guidance about careers are important factors for social mobility. The report highlighted the importance of access to valuable skills on the ability of a person to move forward in their life. The importance of English proficiency is usually seen as a highly desired attribute in today's society and this may influence the perception of the individual about the future.

A number of studies have shown that there is a close association between the perceptions of social mobility and English proficiency. Tulaboyevna and Sunnatilloevich

(2025) stated that people with a high English language proficiency have a higher perception of educational and occupational possibilities. The researchers concluded that English is playing a significant role in facilitating access to global labour markets, and professional careers which may not otherwise be available. English, thus, remains a stepping stone to high-ranking jobs and advanced education in Pakistan. Ali, Nawaz and Imran (2022) investigated the effects of English language proficiency on employment opportunities in private sector in Pakistan. They discovered that English is often considered an asset when applying for a job and a related trait to professional competence by employers. The research found that the command of English language has a significant relationship and influence on employment opportunities and perceptions of upward mobility. Likewise, Rizwan et al. (2026) observed that Pakistanis students believe that English is an aid to getting a better social position in society and better job opportunities. Participants thought that being fluent in English helps to improve their chances of getting a job, fitting in and being recognized socially, and having better economic opportunities. These results indicate that prestige of the English language is a factor that influences students expectations of their future socioeconomic opportunities.

2.4 English Language Prestige and Career Aspirations

Career aspirations are the goals, ambitions and expectations of people about their future careers and career outcomes. Factors that influence career aspirations include the educational experiences a person has, socioeconomic background, opportunities perceived, and motivation. Language attitudes can also have a substantial role to play in shaping career aspirations, especially in situations where language skills are linked to the success in the career. Many studies have shown that students tend to view English proficiency as a necessary skill for desired career outcomes. In the study carried out by Alles (2024), positive attitudes toward English were correlated with high career aspirations and educational aspiration among university students. Participants felt that their English ability would help them to be more competitive in the workforce and to get good jobs. Jackson and Takahashi (2026) also found that students often connect success in English with the future and opportunities abroad and success in the workplace. They found that instrumental value of English encourages students to invest in language learning and to have future plans and aspirations in their field and profession. English is then used not only as a means of communication but as a sign of future success in their profession.

The connection between English and aspirations of career in Pakistan is especially strong as many high-status jobs demand high level of English language skills. Ali et al (2022) reported that English is commonly a priority for employers in the private sector of Pakistan during recruitment processes. Students therefore, often see English as a requirement to get a good job and success in their career. Moreover, Raza et al. (2025) suggested that English is perceived as a language of opportunity and social and economic

progress. Learners who think of English as prestigious can thus have better career aspirations because they believe that English will provide them with access to a rewarding career path. These perceptions have further reinforced the symbolic and practical significance of English in the Pakistani society.

2.5 Research Gap

The literature reviewed reveals that English remains a high-prestige language of educational achievement, language capital, social mobility and career progression. There have been earlier studies (above reviewed) that have explored language attitudes, EL, linguistic capital, employability and perceptions of social mobility in different settings (Ahmad et al., 2024; Ahmad et al., 2025). However, there is less research which examines the joint effect of three variables of English Language Prestige, Social Mobility and Career Aspirations in the Pakistan context of higher education. The existing studies are either on language attitudes or on employability but less studies are available which study the interrelationship among these language attitudes and employability. Moreover, there is limited quantitative evidence available for undergraduate students from Pakistani public sector universities (see 3.2). In this regard, the present study aims to fill this gap by investigating the relationship of perceptions of English language prestige to perceived social mobility and career aspirations of undergraduate students in Pakistani universities.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study adopted a quantitative research design to study the relationship between English language prestige, perceived social mobility and career aspirations among Pakistani university students. When looking at the relationship between variables using numbers and statistics, quantitative research is appropriate. A cross-sectional survey design was used for the study with data collected from the respondents at one time by using a structured questionnaire (Appendix 1). This design allowed the verification of students criteria about the prestige of the English language, about social mobility and about their career aspirations, and to study the relationships between the variables.

3.2 Population and Sampling

The study participants were undergraduate students of the University of Okara, University of Sahiwal and University of Agriculture Faisalabad, Okara Campus. The universities were chosen as they are key public-sector higher education institutions in the area, and they offer access to students with a range of academic and socio-economic backgrounds. For the study, 300 undergraduate students were selected (see Tables 4.1, and 4.2). Proportional stratified random sampling was used to achieve representation from all three universities. The population was initially divided into three strata according to the selected universities and subsequently random sampling was carried out within each stratum. The sample comprised of about 194 students from University of Okara students,

119 from University of Sahiwal, and 71 from University of Agriculture Faisalabad, Okara Campus. This sampling method facilitated to have a representative number of students from all the institutions selected in the study.

3.3 Data Collection Instrument

A structured questionnaire (Appendix 1) with four sections was used to collect data. The first part collected socio-demographic data including age, gender, university and academic field. The second part assessed students' perception of the prestige of the English language. The third part examined perceptions of social mobility and the fourth part career aspirations. The items from the questionnaire were scored according to a 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree). The instrument was adapted from the previous studies on language attitudes, linguistic capital, social mobility and career aspirations. The questionnaire was content validated by experts, having background in sociolinguistics and educational research before the main study.

3.4 Data Collection Procedure

Prior to data collection, permission was obtained from the relevant university authorities. Participants were told about the aims of the study and that the information obtained would be kept confidential and used strictly for academic research. Responses were voluntary and informed consent was obtained from all respondents.

To ensure maximum participation, the questionnaires were given in various print and online forms. The students were provided with ample time to fill the questionnaire and all completed questionnaires were collected and checked for completeness prior to analysis.

3.5 Data Analysis Techniques

All the data collected was coded and entered into the statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) version 26 for analysis. Descriptive statistics, that is, means, and standard deviations (Tables 4.3, 4.4, 4.5) were presented for the demographic characteristics and responses of participants.

For the purpose of answering the first research question, Pearson Product-Moment Correlation (Table 4.7) was used to investigate the association between prestige of English language and their feeling about social mobility among the Pakistani university students.

To answer research question 2, Multiple Linear Regression Analysis (Table 4.10) was performed to find the level of influence of English language prestige and perceived social mobility on students career aspirations.

Furthermore, Cronbach's Alpha Reliability Analysis (Table 4.6) was conducted for the scales of the questionnaire to test the internal consistency of the scales. The reliability coefficient of .70 or higher was deemed as acceptable for the study. Data obtained from the statistical analyses were analysed at 0.05 significance level.

4. Results

4.1 Demographic Profile of Respondents**Table 4.1 Gender Distribution of Respondents**

The Table 4.1 shows that 54.2 percent (208) of the respondents were female and 45.8 percent (176) were male. This distribution indicates that there was a good representation of both genders in this study.

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	176	45.8
Female	208	54.2
Total	384	100

The majority of respondents (Table 4.2) belonged to the University of Okara (50.5%), followed by the University of Sahiwal (31.0%), and UAF Okara Campus (18.5%).

Table 4.2 University-wise Distribution

University	Frequency	Percentage
University of Okara	194	50.5
University of Sahiwal	119	31.0
UAF Okara Campus	71	18.5
Total	384	100

4.2 Statement-Wise Analysis of English Language Prestige

The overall mean score (Table 4.3) of 4.00 shows that respondents perceived that in general English has a prestigious position in Pakistani society. The highest mean score ($M = 4.21$) was obtained for the statement that English is a prestigious language in Pakistan. The students also strongly agreed that English is seen as linked to education, intelligence and success in the profession. From these results it can be inferred that these respondents perceive English as a language of status, power and opportunity.

Table 4.3 English Language Prestige

Statement	Mean	SD
English is a prestigious language in Pakistani society.	4.21	0.76
People who speak English fluently are generally respected more.	4.09	0.81
English proficiency improves a person's social status.	4.05	0.84
English is associated with education and intelligence.	4.14	0.79
English-speaking individuals are perceived as more professional.	3.95	0.88
English is important for success in modern society.	4.12	0.82
Speaking English increases social recognition.	3.87	0.91
English is more prestigious than local languages.	3.76	1.02
English proficiency enhances public image.	3.84	0.93
English is a symbol of social advancement.	4.02	0.87
Overall Mean	4.00	0.86

4.3 Statement-Wise Analysis of Perceived Social Mobility

The overall mean score of 3.99 (Table 4.4) indicates that people had a strong perception of English as a tool for upward social mobility. Students with strong English skills have better career opportunities received the highest mean score ($M = 4.19$). These results indicate that the students equate proficiency in English with educational progress, career achievement and socioeconomic betterment.

Table 4.4 Perceived Social Mobility

Statement	Mean	SD
English proficiency improves socioeconomic position.	4.11	0.78
Students with strong English skills have better career opportunities.	4.19	0.73
English increases access to high-paying jobs.	3.98	0.87
English helps individuals move to a higher social class.	3.74	0.94
English contributes to educational advancement.	4.15	0.77
English opens doors to professional networks.	3.88	0.89
English proficiency improves quality of life.	3.81	0.91
English helps individuals compete in the job market.	4.07	0.83
English provides opportunities otherwise unavailable.	3.92	0.88
English is important for upward mobility in Pakistan.	4.03	0.81
Overall Mean	3.99	0.84

4.4 Statement-Wise Analysis of Career Aspirations

The overall mean score of 4.05 (Table 4.5) implies that the career aspirations of the respondents are quite high. Students were very keen to have a good job, go on to further education and find a good job. These results also show that students feel English proficiency is an important factor in attaining their future career goals.

Table 4.5 Career Aspirations

Statement	Mean	SD
I aspire to obtain a highly respected profession.	4.23	0.72
I am motivated to pursue a successful career.	4.19	0.76
I plan to continue education after graduation.	3.94	0.91
I aim to work in a national or international organization.	4.01	0.88
English proficiency will help me achieve career goals.	4.08	0.82
I am willing to improve my English skills.	4.17	0.78
I expect to achieve higher occupational status.	3.89	0.90
I have ambitious professional goals.	4.06	0.84
Educational achievement is essential for success.	4.14	0.79
I am confident about achieving my career objectives.	3.83	0.92
Overall Mean	4.05	0.83

4.5 Reliability Analysis

Cronbach's Alpha coefficient values were between .84 and .89 (Table 4.6), suggesting high internal consistency. All values were higher than the recommended value of .70, hence the instrument was deemed reliable for data collection and analysis.

Table 4.6 Cronbach's Alpha Reliability Statistics

Variable	Number of Items	Cronbach Alpha
English Language Prestige	10	.86
Perceived Social Mobility	10	.88
Career Aspirations	10	.84
Overall Instrument	30	.89

4.6 Research Question 1

The Research Question 1 focused the relationship between English language prestige and perceived social mobility among Pakistani university students. The Pearson correlation coefficient (Table 4.7) suggested that there was a strong positive correlation between ELP and PSM ($r = .716$, $p < .01$). These results show that students' perceptions of prestige in English is a significant predictor of their view that speaking English would lead to social mobility. These results (Table 4.7) corroborate with the concept of linguistic capital that has been postulated by Bourdieu (1968) and elaborated by Abrar-ul-Hassan (2021). English is, thus, seen as a language of communication and also as a instrument for education, work and society.

Table 4.7 Pearson Correlation Analysis

Variables	1	2
English Language Prestige	1	.716**
Perceived Social Mobility	.716**	1

$p < .01$

4.7 Research Question 2

Research Question 2 concerned the influence of ELP and PSM on career aspirations among Pakistani university students. From the results (Table 4.8) it is seen that there are significant positive correlation between all the variables. Students with more positive attitudes toward the prestige and social mobility have greater career aspirations.

Table 4.8 Correlation Matrix

Variables	ELP	PSM	CA
English Language Prestige	1	.716**	.575**
Perceived Social Mobility	.716**	1	.774**
Career Aspirations	.575**	.774**	1

$p < .01$

The model accounts for about 60 percent (Table 4.9) of the variation in career aspirations. This suggests that both ELP and PSM have significant explanatory power for predicting students' career aspirations.

Table 4.9 Model Summary

R	R Square	Adjusted R Square
.775	.600	.598

PSM was one of the most important predictors of career aspirations ($\beta = .734$, $p < .001$). controlling for PSM, however, ELP was not statistically significant ($\beta = .049$, $p = .371$). These results (Table 4.10) suggest that beliefs about upward social mobility have a greater influence on career aspirations than prestige perceptions.

Table 4.10 Regression Coefficients

Predictor	B	Beta	Sig.
Constant	0.306	—	.091
English Language Prestige	0.058	.049	.371
Perceived Social Mobility	0.836	.734	.000

4.8 Summary of Findings

The study findings indicated that the undergraduate students of university of Okara, university of Sahiwal and university of Agriculture Faisalabad, Okara campus have very positive attitudes towards the prestige of the English language. The overall mean score for ELP showed that generally students consider English as a language associated with education, intelligence, professionalism and social status. The majority of the respondents agreed that there is high social recognition and it is better perceived by society to people who have a strong English language proficiency. The results of this study indicate that English still holds a special place and prestige in the Pakistan sociolinguistic context.

The findings also showed that students highly appreciate that English is a significant aspect of social mobility. The respondents felt that English enables them to enjoy better opportunities in education, better job opportunities, better professional networks, and better socioeconomic status. The overall mean score for PSM showed (Table 4.4) that students believe that English is a useful tool for social mobility. The result corroborates the claim that English is a language of capital that can be translated into educational and economic advantages.

Likewise, the analysis (Table 4.5) found that the respondents have high career aspirations. The students felt very positive about successful career opportunities, high-quality employment, further education and employment in national and international organisations. The results indicated that students see English proficiency as a means to help them realize their career aspirations, and as a way to increase their job opportunities. Overall, the findings suggest that ambitious educational and occupational aspirations are evidenced by responses.

The Pearson Product-Moment Correlation analysis (Table 4.7) showed a strong positive correlation between the research variables of ELP and PSM with respect to the first research objective. The results showed that students holding highly prestigious views of English are more likely to feel that English can lead to an upward social mobility. These

results indicate that perceptions of language prestige do have a significant effect on students expectations in terms of future socioeconomic advancement.

In answer to the second research question, the results showed strong positive correlations between ELP, PSM and career aspirations. Students with more positive perceptions of both the prestige of English and social mobility were more likely to have high career aspirations. In addition, the data showed that the variance in career aspirations was accounted for to a significant degree by ELP and PSM in the regression analysis.

The regression analysis (Table 4.10) also showed that PSM was the most significant predictor of career aspirations. Students who thought that English could help them to have a better career path were more likely to have high hopes for their future careers and careers goals. ELP was statistically insignificant when added to the regression model with PSM, but was positively related to aareer aspirations. The finding may indicate that an important mechanism by which the prestige of English affects career aspirations is through students perceptions of social mobility.

The results of the study, as a whole, show that English remains an important language tool in the higher education context in Pakistan. Language education not only is a process of communication but also is a symbol of prestige, a path to social mobility, and a way to success in the future career for students. The findings reveal the importance of English in influencing students expectations associated with education, society, and employment in the present Pakistani scenario.

5. Discussion

The main objective of this study was to explore the relationship between ELP, PSM and career aspiration of undergraduate students at universities in Punjab, Pakistan. The results of the study offer significant insight into the sociolinguistic value of English in Pakistan's higher education setting and lend credence to the notion that English is a valuable linguistic resource linked to educational, social and professional success (Ahmad et al., 2021; Ahmad et al., 2023).

The first major finding of this study was that the students had very favourable attitudes towards the prestige of the English language. The statement-wise analysis revealed that people strongly believe that English is linked with education, intelligence, professionalism and social status. English was also regarded as a symbol of prestige and modernity in Pakistani society by students. This result aligns with the study conducted by Abrar-ul-Hassan (2021) who claimed that English remains as a dominant linguistic capital in the context of higher education and offers valuable opportunities of academic and professional life, and is further supported by recent corpus-based studies examining linguistic features in Pakistani academic writing (Ahmad et al., 2024; Ahmad et al., 2025). These results also corroborate with the study of Rizwan et al. (2026) who found that generally, Pakistani university students view English as a symbol of power, prestige, and

social recognition. Likewise, Raza et al. (2025) reported that the symbolic status of English is high compared to local languages due to its relation with education, globalisation and socioeconomic success. The present results thus validate the privileged position of English in the socio-linguistic hierarchy of Pakistan.

The second key finding was that students strongly associate with having good English with being able to make a move up the social status. Participants agreed that using English helps to provide greater access to educational opportunities, to professional networks, to good jobs and better socioeconomic status. This finding aligns with the idea that language can be an important tool for social mobility. The findings corroborate those of Tulaboyevna and Sunnatilloevich (2025) who found that English competence plays a significant role in social mobility and enables people to be more successful when seeking opportunities for education and employment across the world. Similarly, the OECD and Greiff (2024) emphasized that valuable educational skills and competencies play a crucial role in promoting upward mobility and socioeconomic advancement. The results further corroborate the findings of Ali, Nawaz, and Imran (2022) that having English proficiency is a positive attribute for employment prospects in the private sector in Pakistan, and are consistent with the broader body of research on English language attitudes in Pakistan (Ahmad et al., 2019; Ahmad & Shah, 2019). As a result, the present study upholds the belief that students consider English as important means of attaining higher socioeconomic status.

The results also showed that respondents have high ambitions for their future careers and are very favorable in their aspiration for making a successful career. Students shared their desire to pursue further education, as well as to find good jobs and join national and international institutions. In addition, a large proportion of the respondents felt that they would benefit from being proficient in English in order to reach their future career aspirations. The result is similar to Alles (2024) who found that university students with positive attitudes towards English had higher educational aspirations and career ambitions. Similarly, Jackson and Takahashi (2026) observed that the students often equate English competence with future achievement, overseas opportunities and success in the working world. Based on the present findings, students see English as an important factor that contributes to career development and future success.

The correlation analysis indicated a strong positive correlation between ELP and PSM in relation to the first research objective. This finding implies that the higher the prestige of English, the higher the likelihood that students think English can enable them to move up in society. This finding is an important affirmation of Bourdieu's (1968) theory of linguistic capital, the idea that socially valued language skills can be transformed into educational, social and economic benefits. Similarly the study by Abrar-ul-Hassan (2021) highlighted that English is considered as valuable asset which helps individuals to avail

higher education institutes and professions. The results of the present study thus support the theoretical claim that perceptions of language prestige affect one's beliefs about future social mobility.

The second research goal explored how ELP and PSM affected career aspirations. The correlation analysis showed strong positive correlations between all the three variables. Those who felt English was 'upmarket' and that it helps those to have a better pay rise were more likely to have high career aspirations. This result is similar to earlier studies that indicated a relationship between language attitudes and educational motivation and career aspirations. Jackson and Takahashi (2026) claimed that positive attitudes towards English facilitate efforts to acquire the language by the learners as they believe it will lead to better opportunities and success in the future. The same goes for Alles (2024) who reported that students with positive values towards English have higher educational and occupational aspirations.

A regression analysis was used to gain more insight into the relationship between the study variables. The results showed that PSM was the strongest predictor of career aspirations, while ELP failed to predict career aspirations significantly, when controlling for PSM. The results indicate that the impact of prestige of English on career choice is mediated by students' conviction on social mobility. That is, students are not motivated to pursue successful careers because of the prestige of English; they have more effective career goals because they think that English can help enhance their educational experiences, job prospects, and socioeconomic outcomes. This study contributes to past literature by providing an explanation of the role of perceptions of social mobility between language prestige and career-related outcomes.

The results, taken on a theoretical level, are highly consistent with the theory of linguistic capital of Bourdieu (1968). This view regards language as a type of capital that can be transformed into social, cultural and economic benefits. The findings of the present study show that English remains an important language which is still utilized by Pakistani higher education institutions. Students see English as a pathway to access opportunities that can lead to their future social and professional success. English therefore plays a vital role in communication and is also used as a pathway to educational attainment, mobility and promotion.

The overall results illustrate that English plays an important role in the context of students' educational and socio-economic goals in Pakistan's universities. These positive relationships between ELP, PSM and career aspirations further reinforce the continued relevance of English in the higher education system and job market in Pakistan. The study adds to the emerging sociolinguistic literature by offering empirical evidence on the part of English as a linguistic capital and its effect on students' perceptions of social and professional growth.

6. Conclusion

The present study was an attempt to find the relationships between ELP, PSM and career aspirations of the undergraduate students. The results showed that students have very positive attitude towards the prestige of English language. In general, the respondents perceived English as a language of education, intelligence, professionalism, social status and modernity. The findings show that English still carries a privileged status in the Pakistani society and it is still a valuable sign of educational and social development. Students valued the skill of English as a positive attribute that can help them in their image, studies and job market.

The study also revealed a strong belief among students about the importance of English proficiency for promoting upward mobility in the society. The English language was seen as a valuable tool in gaining access to good educational opportunities, better professional networks, good socioeconomic status and good jobs. These results indicate that English is used as a linguistic capital that students see as a means towards social and economic mobility. The findings show the significance of the role that English plays in influencing students expectations of future opportunities and life chances. Additionally, the results showed that the respondents have high level of career aspirations. Students had a very strong desire to have good career, further studies, good professions and work in good national and international organizations. Furthermore, the respondents thought that English proficiency would be one of the factors that will help them in meeting the objectives of their career and in their future career.

As for the first research question, a positive correlation between ELP and PSM was found. Students who considered English to be a very prestigious language tended to see English as the path to upward mobility. The results indicate that perceptions of prestige of the language have a significant impact on the beliefs of the students about future socioeconomic progress. In terms of the second research question of this study, it was determined that there are significant positive correlations between ELP, PSM and career aspirations. Students who felt higher levels of prestige and social mobility of English also exhibited higher career aspiration levels. In addition, the regression analysis indicated that PSM had the greatest impact on career aspirations. Results show that students attitudes toward the social and economic value of English are important factors in their educational and occupational aspirations.

In conclusion of the study, it can be said that English is still playing a significant role as a tool in higher education in Pakistan. In addition to being used for communication, English is seen as a symbol of prestige, a route to social mobility and a way of achieving success in the future career. The results strengthen the claim that English is a valuable language asset that affects students perceptions of educational opportunities, their social mobility and occupational success. Hence, the importance of English is not limited to

language learning but is related to broader concerns of social mobility, career and socioeconomic aspirations of the Pakistani university students.

7. Recommendations

1. To facilitate students' academic and career skills development, universities should improve opportunities for English language learning by offering communication skills courses, English language development courses, and English language proficiency courses.
2. Higher education institutions need to be integrating career counseling and guidance service with English language education so that students gain knowledge and awareness about the importance of English for their career development, employability and social mobility.
3. Educational policymakers and university administrators should make sure there are equitable access to good English language resources and support services for students of various socio-economic groups and promote educational success and future employment opportunities.

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Appendix-1

Questionnaire

Section A: Demographic Information

Please tick (✓) the most appropriate option.

1. Gender

☐ Male

☐ Female

☐ Prefer not to say

2. Age
 - ☐ 18–20 years
 - ☐ 21–23 years
 - ☐ 24–26 years
 - ☐ Above 26 years
3. University
 - ☐ University of Okara
 - ☐ University of Sahiwal
 - ☐ University of Agriculture Faisalabad, Okara Campus
4. Academic Discipline
 - ☐ Social Sciences
 - ☐ Natural Sciences
 - ☐ Management Sciences
 - ☐ Arts and Humanities
 - ☐ Agriculture
 - ☐ Other _____
5. Semester
 - ☐ 1st–2nd
 - ☐ 3rd–4th
 - ☐ 5th–6th
 - ☐ 7th–8th

Section B: English Language Prestige Scale

Instructions: Please indicate your level of agreement with each statement using the following scale:

1	=	Strongly	Disagree
2	=		Disagree
3	=		Neutral
4	=		Agree
5 = Strongly Agree			

No.	Statement	1	2	3	4	5
1	English is a prestigious language in Pakistani society.					
2	People who speak English fluently are generally respected more.					
3	English proficiency improves a person's social status.					
4	English is associated with education and intelligence.					
5	English-speaking individuals are perceived as more professional.					
6	English is an important language for success in modern society.					

7	Speaking English increases an individual's social recognition.					
8	English is more prestigious than most local languages in Pakistan.					
9	English proficiency enhances a person's public image.					
10	English is a symbol of social and educational advancement.					

Section C: Perceived Social Mobility Scale

No.	Statement	1	2	3	4	5
11	English proficiency can improve an individual's socioeconomic position.					
12	Students with strong English skills have better career opportunities.					
13	English proficiency increases access to higher-paying jobs.					
14	English can help individuals move to a higher social class.					
15	English proficiency contributes to educational advancement.					
16	Knowledge of English opens doors to better professional networks.					
17	English proficiency can improve quality of life.					
18	English helps individuals compete effectively in the job market.					
19	English provides opportunities that may not be available otherwise.					
20	English proficiency is important for upward social mobility in Pakistan.					

Section D: Career Aspirations Scale

No.	Statement	1	2	3	4	5
21	I aspire to obtain a highly respected profession.					
22	I am motivated to pursue a successful professional career.					
23	I plan to continue my education after graduation.					
24	I aim to work in a national or international organization.					
25	I believe English proficiency will help me achieve my career goals.					
26	I am willing to improve my English skills to enhance my career prospects.					
27	I expect to achieve a higher occupational status in the future.					
28	I have ambitious professional goals for my future.					
29	I believe that educational achievement is essential for career success.					

30	I am confident that I can achieve my desired career objectives.					
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Scoring Procedure

- English Language Prestige: Items 1–10
- Perceived Social Mobility: Items 11–20
- Career Aspirations: Items 21–30

Higher scores indicate:

- Greater perceived prestige of English.
- Stronger perceptions of social mobility through English.
- Higher levels of career aspirations.

Reliability Analysis

The reliability of the instrument will be assessed through Cronbach's Alpha. A reliability coefficient of 0.70 or above will be considered acceptable for all three scales.