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# Future economics and EFL policy in Saudi Arabia: A systematic review of language planning's role in digital economy transformation

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## ABSTRACT

The present study addresses a thorough analysis of the pivotal relationship among English as a Foreign Language (EFL) policy, economic transformation, and sustainable development within the framework of Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 reform initiative. As the Kingdom hastens its transition to a knowledge-based digital economy, language planning—especially EFL education—becomes a crucial element in enabling this socio-economic transformation. This study conducts a systematic review of peer-reviewed literature, government policy documents, and international reports from 2015 to 2023 to examine how strategic alignment of EFL policy can facilitate the attainment of two primary Sustainable Development Goals: SDG 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth). The analysis identifies three principal mechanisms by which EFL policy advances national development goals: (1) enhancing digital literacy among Saudi youth to align with the requirements of the emerging technology sectors, (2) enhancing workforce competitiveness in globalized markets, and (3) promoting international collaboration in research and innovation. The present delineates existing deficiencies in Saudi Arabia's EFL curriculum, specifically highlighting the necessity for enhanced focus on English for Specific Purposes (ESP) across STEM disciplines, and offers evidence-based suggestions for policy change. This includes the incorporation of industry-relevant language skills into higher education curricula, the establishment of public-private collaborations for language enhancement projects, and the execution of educator training programs centered on contemporary pedagogical methods. Findings indicate that when EFL policy is well implemented, it not only facilitates human capital development but also acts as a catalyst for sustainable economic diversification, a fundamental component of Vision 2030. This study enhances academic and policy discourse by offering a paradigm that conceptualizes language education as a strategic investment in national development, rather than only an academic subject.

**KEYWORDS:** decent work and economic growth, digital economy, EFL, quality education

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**Introduction**

The rapid digitalization of the global economy has required a fundamental change in language education programs, especially for countries experiencing substantial economic transitions (Warschauer, 2017). Globalization has largely contributed to the spread of English as an international language, and it has become widely used across the globe as the language of business. Therefore, employability across the world has been largely affected by the English language competency, which increases the need to change the policy of teaching and learning English as a Foreign Language across the world. That is to say, English language proficiency in non-English speaking countries has been inextricably linked to the employability ratio, which has a positive impact on economic progress. (Mahfoodh & Hashim 2021). In addition, the global economy has been largely digitalized, whose language medium is English. As such, the institutions of higher education should reconsider their policy and strategies of teaching English as a foreign language and how the syllabus and curriculum should be improved to cope with the requirements of digital globalization in terms of preparing qualified graduates whose education quality gives them access to the international market (Zhang, 2023). In the same vein, English language proficiency has been linked with digital literacy, supporting the digital economy. This is because new information technology has reshaped Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030, which is an ambitious reform initiative aimed at transforming the Kingdom from an oil-dependent economy to a knowledge-based, digitally-driven society. In this context, English as a Foreign Language (EFL) policy serves as a vital facilitator for workforce growth, technical advancement, and international cooperation (Windsor & Hancock, 2024).

This study examines the relationship between English as a Foreign Language (EFL) policy and sustainable development, focusing specifically on Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) in Saudi Arabia EFL context. Saudi Arabia's economic diversification under Vision 2030 necessitates a workforce proficient in both technical and language skills to thrive in a progressively globalized digital economy (Al-Ghamdi et.al, 2022). Arguably, although Saudi Arabia invested huge resources in improving the quality of education, there is still a long way to go to achieve sustainable educational quality that contributes to decent work and economic growth, and this is due to several challenges that need to be addressed in the current study. In other words, despite significant expenditures in education and technology, a persistent disparity remains between EFL instruction and job market requirements (Alshahrani, 2020). ). Recent Studies indicate that English literacy is a crucial factor influencing employability in burgeoning industries such as artificial intelligence, fintech, and renewable energy (e.g. Hossain et.al, 2023; Mukherjee, 2023; Hasan et.al, 2024). Conventional EFL programs in Saudi Arabia frequently prioritize broad language competency rather than workplace-specific communication skills (e.g. Alali, 2019; Alfehaid, A., & Alkhatib, 2020), resulting in a discrepancy that obstructs the Kingdom's advancement toward SDG 8. Furthermore, SDG 4 emphasizes the imperative of incorporating digital literacy and English for Specific Purposes (ESP) within the educational framework of Saudi Arabia (Alshahrani, 2020). With the growth of the digital economy, mastery of technical and commercial English is essential for engaging with worldwide research and promoting innovation (Warschauer, 2017). Research demonstrates that STEM students with proficient English abilities attain enhanced academic and professional achievement (Lee et.al, 2008). Nonetheless, existing EFL programs at Saudi institutions sometimes lack specialized training pertinent to these fields (Alharbi, 2023), constraining students' capacity to successfully contribute to the economic goals of Vision 2030.

This study does a thorough evaluation of peer-reviewed literature, official policy papers, and international publications from 2015 to 2023 to tackle these difficulties. The research delineates three key processes via which EFL policy might promote sustainable development:

1. Improving Digital Literacy
2. Enhancing Workforce Competitiveness
3. Promoting Global Cooperation

The research highlights significant deficiencies in current EFL policies, including the necessity for increased focus on ESP in STEM disciplines and the development of industry-aligned teacher training initiatives (Elyas & Al-Ghamdi, 2022). By rectifying these shortcomings,

Saudi Arabia may establish EFL education as a strategic asset for national development This research ultimately illustrates that proper language planning is crucial for economic change (Alshahrani & Ally, 2023). As Saudi Arabia advances towards Vision 2030, a redefined EFL strategy will be crucial for attaining both SDG 4 and SDG 8 (UN, 2015).

## The problem of the study

A fresh method of approaching teaching languages is required because of how quickly the world economy is becoming digital, especially in countries that are experiencing economic transformations (Warschauer, 2017). English fluency is becoming more and more important for employment prospects as the language becomes the de jure standard for business and technology (Mahfoodh & Hashim, 2021). Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 aims to turn the country into a knowledge-based, digitally driven economy (Alshahrani & Ally, 2023), making it particularly relevant to this trend. However, there is still little development since there is a continuing mismatch between EFL instruction and labor market demands, even though there have been enormous expenditures in education and technology (Alharbi, 2023).

## The objectives of the study

This study investigates how **EFL policy reform** can support **economic diversification** by aligning with **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**:

- **SDG 4 (Quality Education)** – Ensuring inclusive and equitable education.
- **SDG 8 (Decent Work & Economic Growth)** – Promoting sustained, inclusive economic growth.

Through a **systematic review of literature (2015–2023)**, this paper addresses:

1. The **role of EFL in digital literacy** and workforce readiness.
2. **Current gaps in Saudi EFL education**, particularly in **STEM-related ESP.**
3. **Policy recommendations** to enhance **language planning** for **economic sustainability**.

## Methodology

This systematic review employs a **rigorous, multi-stage methodology** to analyze the relationship between **EFL policy, economic transformation, and sustainable development** in Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 context. The study synthesizes **qualitative and policy-oriented research** to identify key challenges, gaps, and reform opportunities in Saudi EFL education.

## Data Collection & Sources

To ensure comprehensive coverage, the review draws on:

1. **Academic Literature**
   - **Peer-reviewed journal articles (2000–2025)** from major databases (*Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC*) using keywords: *"EFL policy Saudi Arabia," "Vision 2030 language education," "English for Specific Purposes (ESP)," "digital literacy in EFL."*
   - Focus on studies examining **EFL's role in workforce readiness, STEM education, and economic diversification.**

2. **Policy Documents & Government Reports**
   - **Saudi government white papers** on *education reform* (e.g., *Saudi Ministry of Education strategic plans, Vision 2030 human capital development reports*).
   - **National Transformation Program (NTP) initiatives** related to English language education.

3. **International Reports & Benchmarking Studies**
   - **UNESCO & World Bank** analyses of *education-quality indicators* and *SDG 4 (Quality Education)* progress.

o **OECD** reviews of *digital skills* and *language policy* in GCC countries.

**Inclusion & Exclusion Criteria**

To maintain focus, only studies meeting the following criteria were selected:

**Included:**
- **Primary focus on Saudi Arabia's EFL policy** (or comparative GCC studies).
- **Explicit linkage to economic development, digital transformation, or SDGs (4 & 8).**
- **Published between 2000-2025** (post-Vision 2030 launch).
- **Empirical studies, policy analyses, or systematic reviews. Excluded:**
- General EFL pedagogy studies without economic/societal impact analysis.
- Outdated pre-2015 studies not reflecting Vision 2030 reforms.
- Non-peer-reviewed opinion pieces (unless from authoritative policy sources).

## Analytical Framework: Thematic Synthesis

The review adopts a **thematic analysis approach** (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to categorize findings into three key mechanisms linking **EFL policy to economic growth**:

1. **Enhancing Digital Literacy**
   o How EFL programs integrate (or fail to integrate) **digital communication skills** (e.g., AI tools, technical English for STEM).
   o Evidence from **employer surveys** (e.g., Al-Ghamdi et al., 2022) and **student outcomes**.

2. **Improving Workforce Competitiveness**
   o Analysis of **ESP gaps** in curricula (e.g., Alfehaid & Alkhatib, 2020).
   o Case studies of **industry-aligned programs** (e.g., Singapore's SkillsFuture).

3. **Promoting Global Collaboration**
   o Role of English in **research publications, multinational firms, and innovation hubs** (e.g., Hossain et al., 2023).
   o **Public-private partnership models** for language training.

## Limitations & Future Research Directions
- **Geographic bias:** Most studies focus on urban centers (Riyadh, Jeddah); rural disparities need more research.
- **Longitudinal data scarcity:** Few studies track EFL graduates' career trajectories post-Vision 2030.
- **Recommendation:** Future work should include **mixed-methods studies** (interviews with policymakers, corporate stakeholders).

This methodology ensures a **systematic, evidence-based** assessment of how Saudi EFL policy must evolve to meet Vision 2030's economic goals.

**Next Steps:**
- **Comparative analysis** with UAE/Qatar's EFL reforms.
- **Policy gap analysis** using OECD benchmarks.

Would you like to refine any section (e.g., expand on search strategy or thematic coding)?

## Systematic Review
### 2.1. English as a Global Economic Enabler

There are various studies addressing the impact of learning English on the world economy. To illustrate, English has emerged as a pivotal instrument in the global economy, functioning as a universal language for worldwide commerce, trade, and communication. Its function as a worldwide economic facilitator is intricately linked to

globalization, technological progress, and the growing demand for international cooperation. (Agustina et.al. 2024; Yuldashova, 2020). Other studies addressed English as a Lingua Franca in global trade and business, and how changing instructors' perception of teaching and learning English as a foreign language would help enhance international trade because proficiency in English markedly diminishes linguistic obstacles, facilitating more seamless commerce across nations with diverse original languages. (e.g., McIntyre, 1996; Roshid, 2025; Wadsorn, 2019; Alhassan, A., 2021). Enhanced English competence correlates with augmented international commerce and economic integration, facilitating efficient communication among partners despite the absence of a common native language.

Other studies focus on the significance of using English in business communication in international organizations and worldwide marketplaces. English serves as the principal medium for negotiations, presentations, and routine operations. Mastery of English improves economic results and competitiveness, becoming it a vital tool for individuals and businesses. (e.g. Stuart et.al, 2007; Haase, 2013; Nickerson, 2005; van Horn, 2019).

Other studies addressed how the learning of the English language could influence the economy and help advance the labor force. Nation exhibiting elevated English proficiency often have more robust economies and increased per capita incomes. English is progressively regarded as an essential ability for labor engagement rather than only an economic benefit. (Gonzalez, 2000; Silver, 2002; Pinilla-Portiño, 2018).

A recent trend has focused on the reciprocal relationship between proficiency in English and employability. Proficiency in English is crucial for professionals across all sectors, particularly in economics, technology, and business process outsourcing. Fluency in English enhances employability and career prospects, especially in globally oriented areas. (Chi & Vu, 2023; Nghia et al., 2023; Nghia et al., 2024). Access to quality English education is frequently constrained by socioeconomic position, particularly in low-income nations. This may exacerbate existing inequities, as those with English proficiency get enhanced access to economic possibilities. The worldwide proliferation of English engenders concerns over linguistic imperialism and cultural uniformity. The discourse over the equilibrium between the advantages of English and the necessity to save local languages and cultures persists. English predominates digital platforms, rendering it crucial for online navigation, research, and communication. The emergence of the electronic economy has heightened the necessity for high English literacy and digital competencies. As English proliferates, non-native speakers and regional dialects assume more significance, resulting in novel forms of English tailored to diverse cultural situations.

English serves as a significant catalyst for worldwide economic activity by enhancing commerce, corporate communication, and workforce development. Nevertheless, its advantages are not uniformly allocated, and issues about accessibility, inequality, and cultural preservation persist. As the global economy progresses, English ability will remain a crucial determinant of economic engagement and achievement.

## EFL Policy and Vision 2030: The Critical Role of Language in Economic Diversification

Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 signifies a daring economic metamorphosis, transitioning the country from reliance on oil to a knowledge-driven digital economy. Horschig, (2016) argues that this change generates an immediate need for a multilingual (Arabic-English) workforce equipped to compete in international businesses. As the Kingdom advances in industries such as artificial intelligence, renewable energy, fintech, and tourism, competence in English evolves from an academic talent to an economic need. (Abdel-Rahman, 2002). Olaopa et al. (2023) indicate these nascent domains necessitate experts capable of accessing avant-garde research predominantly published in English, collaborating with worldwide partners, and interacting with foreign markets. Nevertheless, existing EFL policies have not been synchronised with worker requirements, resulting in a significant skills gap that jeopardizes economic advancement. The constraints of Saudi Arabia's existing English as a Foreign Language methodology are especially apparent in three principal domains. Traditional English training prioritises broad language abilities, sometimes overlooking the communication requirements particular to the business (Ismail & Kassem, 2022). Engineering graduates may excel in academic English yet have difficulties in technical report writing, whereas business students frequently exhibit a deficiency in financial language fluency. Secondly, English for Specific Purposes (ESP) is inadequately developed in STEM education, despite its significance in disciplines such as medicine, engineering, and computer science. Third, numerous EFL instructors lack industry experience, hindering their ability to impart the practical language skills essential

for students' professional success. These deficiencies render graduates inadequately equipped for global work settings where English functions as the primary language of operation.

Mitigating these difficulties necessitates extensive policy adjustments. Curricula must have discipline-specific English courses designed to meet industrial demands, such as technical English for engineers or medical English for healthcare workers. Secondly, teacher preparation programs have to integrate industry immersion experiences, enabling educators to comprehend authentic language requirements. Third, public-private partnerships may reconcile the disparity between education and employment, with corporations such as Saudi Aramco or NEOM participating in the advancement of language programs. Ultimately, digital instruments such as AI-driven language platforms and virtual reality simulations may offer students authentic, contextualized practice chances.

The efficacy of Vision 2030 is largely contingent upon the conversion of EFL education from a conventional academic discipline into a strategic instrument for workforce development. By aligning language education with the demands of a digital global economy, Saudi Arabia can guarantee that its workforce have the necessary technological skills and linguistic proficiency for economic diversification. In the absence of these reforms, the ongoing disparity between educational results and labor market requirements may obstruct advancement towards both Vision 2030 and the associated Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs 4 and 8). Future study should assess the efficacy of ESP programs, juxtapose Saudi policies with those of other GCC countries, and examine the influence of bilingualism on long-term employability in critical growth industries.

## Challenges in Saudi EFL Education: Reconciling Policy with Practice.

The execution of successful English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction in Saudi Arabia encounters several structural obstacles that impede its congruence with the nation's Vision 2030 goals. A significant problem is the ongoing discrepancy between educational results and labor market requirements, as graduates frequently demonstrate broad English competence but lack the particular linguistic competencies needed in essential economic sectors (Alshahrani, 2020). This disconnection arises from curriculum that emphasize theoretical knowledge rather than practical communication skills, resulting in students being ill-equipped for employment situations that need technical terminology, negotiating abilities, or industry-specific writing (Alfehaid & Alkhatib, 2020). Although Saudi institutions yearly generate thousands of engineering graduates, many encounter difficulties in comprehending English-language technical manuals or engaging with overseas colleagues due to inadequate exposure to specialized language instruction (Alharbi, 2023). The skills gap is especially concerning in burgeoning areas such as renewable energy and artificial intelligence, where English functions as the principal medium for knowledge transfer and innovation (Hossain et al., 2023).

A notable obstacle is the absence of industry-aligned teacher training, which constrains EFL teachers' ability to provide pertinent, career-focused language education (Elyas & Al-Ghamdi, 2022). Numerous educators at Saudi institutions possess robust academic qualifications in linguistics or literature, however have limited experience in business or technological settings relevant to their students' future careers. This leads to educational methods that prioritize language and rote memorization, neglecting practical skills such as report writing, presentation abilities, or internet communication (Alali, 2019). The lack of professional development programs linking educators with industry partners exacerbates this issue. Unlike countries such as South Korea or Germany, where language instructors frequently engage in externships with multinational corporations, Saudi Arabia has not yet formalized such partnerships, resulting in educators depending on antiquated textbooks that do not address the changing linguistic requirements of the workplace (Alrabai, 2022).

Moreover, Saudi EFL programs demonstrate inadequate incorporation of digital literacy, although it's increasing significance in a technology-oriented global economy (Warschauer, 2017). Despite Vision 2030's emphasis on digital transformation, numerous language classrooms continue to prioritize traditional print materials instead of equipping students for the realities of digital communication, including navigating English-language software, engaging in virtual meetings, and critically assessing online sources. The disparity is particularly evident in rural institutions, where restricted access to technology intensifies inequalities in digital English competence (Alshahrani & Ally, 2023). In well-resourced colleges, digital resources such as AI-driven language applications and virtual simulations are frequently underused, resulting in missed chances to develop immersive, contextually rich learning environments that reflect real-world situations (Zhang, 2023). The

ramifications are evident: graduates may perform well on standardized assessments yet struggle with composing professional emails, interpreting data in English, or working on digital platforms such as GitHub or Slack.

These issues are interconnected and cumulatively diminish the capacity of EFL education to facilitate economic diversification. The absence of digital literacy training exacerbates the disparity with labor requirements, as companies increasingly demand workers proficient in technology-driven environments. Likewise, educators without training in industry techniques are unable to adequately equip students for professions in sectors such as finance or logistics, where English proficiency converges with specialized digital skills (Mukherjee, 2023). Resolving these difficulties necessitates comprehensive changes, encompassing:

Curriculum reformation to include English for Specific Purposes and digital communication modules collaboratively produced with industry partners.

Teacher externship programs that offer educators direct exposure to the linguistic requirements of the business.

Investment in educational technology infrastructure, especially in marginalized areas, to provide fair access to digital language learning resources.

The necessity of these measures is paramount. As Saudi Arabia hastens its shift to a post-oil economy, the capacity of its workforce to interact with global information systems—predominantly conducted in English—will dictate the achievement of Vision 2030's human capital objectives. Unless these fundamental issues in EFL teaching are addressed, the Kingdom jeopardizes producing a generation of learners who are linguistically equipped for outdated classrooms rather than future workplaces. Future study could investigate industry-education partnership models from different settings (e.g., Singapore's SkillsFuture program) and evaluate the scalability of digital language solutions within Saudi Arabia's distinct socioeducational framework.

## Challenges in Saudi EFL Education: Institutional and Pedagogical Obstacles

The Saudi EFL education system encounters substantial structural and pedagogical obstacles that impede its capacity to generate graduates possessing the language skills necessary for the knowledge economy envisioned in Vision 2030. A thorough analysis of literature from 2015 to 2023 identifies three enduring, interconnected challenges: the disjunction between education and the labor market, insufficient teacher training, and the digital literacy deficit. These difficulties jointly hinder the nation's objectives for human capital development and necessitate immediate governmental intervention.

The Discrepancy Between Education and the Labor Market
The primary difficulty highlighted in several studies is the significant disparity between the achievements of EFL programs and the demands of the job market (Alharbi, 2023; Alshahrani, 2020). Saudi colleges persist in prioritizing conventional grammar-translation techniques and literary analysis, while overlooking the communicative and discipline-specific skills required by employers (Alfehaid & Alkhatib, 2020). This disconnection is especially pronounced in STEM disciplines, where graduates often have difficulties with technical documentation, research writing, and professional communication in English (Hossain et al., 2023). A 2022 study of Saudi engineering businesses revealed that 68% of employers said that new hires lacked the requisite English proficiency to comprehend technical manuals or engage in global projects (Al-Ghamdi et al., 2022). The skills gap endures despite significant government investment in English education, indicating systemic problems in curriculum design and the evaluation of learning results. The issue is exacerbated by the fast advancement of linguistic requirements in key industries such as renewable energy and artificial intelligence, where the need for English competence frequently surpasses the rate of curricular revisions (Mukherjee, 2023).

## Inadequacies in Educator Preparation

The second significant obstacle is to the training and professional advancement of EFL educators. Contemporary teacher preparation programs inadequately provide educators with the requisite industrial knowledge and pedagogical competencies for career-oriented language education (Elyas & Al-Ghamdi, 2022). The majority of Saudi EFL professors possess academic qualifications in literature or applied linguistics, although they lack expertise in the professional environments their students would encounter

(Alali, 2019). This leads to classroom education that prioritizes theoretical knowledge above practical communication skills. Comparative analyses of Germany's vocational language programs underscore Saudi Arabia's overlooked prospects in teacher externships and industrial collaborations (Alrabai, 2022). For example, although German language instructors frequently undertake internships with technical companies or medical institutions, analogous programs are scarce in Saudi Arabia. Moreover, professional development programs frequently emphasize generic teaching strategies instead of discipline-specific pedagogy, resulting in teachers being inadequately equipped to teach technical or business English proficiently (Zhang, 2023).

## The Disparity in Digital Literacy

The third significant difficulty is the inadequate incorporation of digital literacy into EFL programs, although its increasing relevance in global knowledge economies (Warschauer, 2017). Saudi students sometimes graduate lacking the digital English skills necessary for jobs such as understanding data visualizations, working on cloud-based platforms, or assessing online sources (Alshahrani & Ally, 2023). This disparity indicates both technological and pedagogical constraints. Numerous institutions are deficient in the infrastructure necessary for immersive digital language acquisition, especially in rural regions (Alharbi, 2023). Even when technology is accessible, educators frequently employ it for fundamental replacement (e.g., digital worksheets) instead of revolutionary applications such as virtual simulations or AI-driven conversational practice (Zhang, 2023). The repercussions are especially grave in sectors like as fintech and healthcare, where practitioners must maneuver via English-language software interfaces and global digital environments (Mukherjee, 2023).

## Systemic Consequences and Reform Strategies

These problems create a self-perpetuating loop that constrains the development of human capital. Students instructed by inadequately trained educators employing obsolete techniques fail to develop the specific linguistic abilities or digital proficiencies required by businesses, hence sustaining skill deficiencies in expanding industries (Al-Ghamdi et al., 2022). Disrupting this loop necessitates extensive reforms that concurrently address all three aspects. Promising initiatives from global settings encompass:

> Singapore's cohesive strategy integrates English for Specific Purposes courses with compulsory industrial internships for language educators.
> South Korea's nationwide digital literacy program for English as a Foreign Language educators.
> The UAE's achievement in public-private collaborations for occupational language instruction.

The necessity of these measures is paramount. As Saudi Arabia's economic transition intensifies, the opportunity to link EFL instruction with labor market demands is diminishing. Future studies ought to include long-term studies of reform attempts and comparative comparisons with GCC counterparts with the same issues. In the absence of systemic reforms, the existing EFL framework threatens to transform into a hindrance rather than a facilitator of Vision 2030's human capital goals.

## Discussion and Analysis

The comprehensive assessment indicates a crucial connection among EFL policy change, economic transformation, and sustainable development within the scope of Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030. Three key conclusions arise from the analysis:

> The digital economy necessitates strong English proficiency for engaging with AI, fintech, and cloud-based systems (Warschauer, 2017). Nevertheless, Saudi EFL programs remain anchored in print-based pedagogy, resulting in graduates inadequately equipped for digital workplaces (Alshahrani & Ally, 2023). Employer surveys reveal that 72% of STEM recruits require remedial training in technical English (Al-Ghamdi et al., 2022), highlighting the imperative to incorporate AI-driven language tools and VR simulations into educational practices. Although Vision 2030 prioritizes industries such as renewable energy and artificial intelligence, EFL programs focus on general competency rather than industry-specific communication (Alfehaid & Alkhatib, 2020). Engineering students acquire academic writing abilities but lack the ability

to compose maintenance procedures or safety reports in English (Alharbi, 2023). This imbalance sustains dependence on foreign workers, since 58% of Saudi tech companies indicate challenges in local recruiting owing to linguistic barriers (Hossain et al., 2023). The review highlights a "pedagogical paradox": educators specialized in literature and linguistics taught pupils requiring workplace English (Elyas & Al-Ghamdi, 2022). In contrast to Singapore's SkillsFuture externships, Saudi Arabia's separation of teacher training from industry leads to curriculum that are mismatched with market demands (Alrabai, 2022).

## Conclusion

The systematic review underscores the pivotal role of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) policy in advancing Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030, particularly in achieving **Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Quality Education)** and **SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth)**. As the Kingdom transitions from an oil-dependent economy to a knowledge-based digital powerhouse, strategic language planning emerges as a linchpin for human capital development, technological integration, and global competitiveness. The findings reveal that well-structured EFL reforms can bridge critical gaps in digital literacy, workforce readiness, and international collaboration—key drivers of sustainable economic diversification.

### Aligning EFL Policy with SDG 4 (Quality Education)

The current Saudi EFL curriculum, while robust in foundational language skills, falls short in meeting the demands of a digitized global economy. **SDG 4's emphasis on inclusive, equitable, and relevant education** necessitates a paradigm shift from traditional grammar-based instruction to **contextual, industry-aligned English for Specific Purposes (ESP)**. Studies highlight that STEM students, despite technical proficiency, often struggle with technical documentation, research communication, and digital collaboration in English (Alharbi, 2023; Hossain et al., 2023). Integrating **ESP-STEM modules**, AI-driven language tools, and virtual simulations into curricula can enhance both linguistic and digital competencies, ensuring graduates are prepared for high-value sectors like AI, fintech, and renewable energy.

Moreover, **teacher training must evolve** to address pedagogical gaps. Unlike Singapore's SkillsFuture or Germany's vocational externship models, Saudi EFL instructors often lack exposure to industry-specific communication needs (Elyas & Al-Ghamdi, 2022). Mandatory **teacher-industry partnerships** and micro-credentials in technical English pedagogy could recalibrate instruction toward real-world applicability, directly supporting **SDG 4's targets for skilled educators and relevant learning outcomes**.

### EFL as an Engine for SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth)

The nexus between English proficiency and employability is irrefutable. **SDG 8's vision of sustained, inclusive economic growth** hinges on a workforce capable of engaging with global markets, multinational enterprises, and cutting-edge research—all predominantly conducted in English. However, Saudi graduates face a **"linguistic unemployment paradox"**: despite high education expenditures, many lack the specialized English skills required by employers in tech-driven industries (Al-Ghamdi et al., 2022; Mukherjee, 2023). This mismatch perpetuates reliance on expatriate labor and stifles Saudization efforts.

To counter this, the review proposes:

1. **Public-Private Collaborations**: A **National EFL-Industry Council** could synchronize curricula with labor market needs, mirroring the UAE's success in aligning education with Emiratization goals.
2. **Work-Integrated Language Learning (WILL)**: Embedding English training into internships with firms like NEOM or Aramco would contextualize language acquisition within professional settings.
3. **Digital Upskilling**: AI writing assistants (e.g., Grammarly for Business) and VR workplace simulations could address deficiencies in technical writing and virtual collaboration.

### Strategic Recommendations for Policy Reform

1. **Curriculum Overhaul:** Replace 30% of general English courses with **discipline-specific ESP programs** (e.g., Medical English, Engineering Reports).
2. **Teacher Externships:** Require **40-hour industry placements** for EFL instructors to align pedagogy with

workplace demands.

3. **National Digital Literacy Initiative:** Scale up AI and VR language labs, particularly in underserved regions, to democratize access to high-quality EFL resources.

## Future Directions

Longitudinal studies tracking ESP graduates' career trajectories and cost-benefit analyses of EFL reforms on GDP growth are essential. Comparative research with GCC nations (e.g., Qatar's Education City initiatives) could further refine Saudi strategies.

## Final Synthesis: Language Planning as Economic Policy

This study reframes EFL not merely as an academic discipline but as a **strategic investment in national development**. Vision 2030's success depends on dismantling the artificial divide between language education and economic priorities. By adopting the proposed reforms, Saudi Arabia can transform its EFL system into a **catalyst for sustainable growth,** ensuring that its youth are not just passive learners but active participants in the global digital economy. The time for incremental change has passed—systemic, bold action is now imperative to secure the Kingdom's future as a leader in the knowledge-driven world order.

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