

The Impact of Linguistic Skills on Career Advancement in Multilingual India: The Role of Communication Competence

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Abstract

This study examines how linguistic skills influence career advancement in multilingual public-sector organizations in India, with a particular focus on the mediating role of communication competence. Integrating Behavioral Public Administration with linguistic capital theory, the study develops and empirically tests a model explaining how latent capabilities are translated into observable performance within institutional evaluation systems. Using survey data from 315 public-sector employees across administration, education, banking, Judicial, healthcare, and other domains, the study applies descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and regression modeling. The findings indicate that multilingual proficiency does not independently predict career advancement, whereas communication competence is a strong and statistically significant predictor ($\beta \approx 0.70$, $p < .001$). The study advances the concept of institutional filtering to explain how organizations prioritize observable competencies over latent abilities. The paper contributes to organizational behavior, public administration, and applied psychology by clarifying the mechanism through which linguistic skills affect career outcomes, and it offers actionable implications for HR systems, training design, and multilingual workforce development.

Keywords: Linguistic skills, communication competence, career advancement, employability, public sector, multilingual workforce

1. Introduction

India represents one of the most linguistically diverse societies in the world, with a complex interplay of languages shaping social, cultural, and administrative interactions. Within this context, public-sector organizations operate in environments where employees are frequently required to engage with stakeholders across multiple linguistic backgrounds. As a result, linguistic skills are often identified as a valuable resource that enhances both administrative effectiveness and citizen engagement. Employees who are proficient in multiple languages are generally assumed to possess an advantage in communication, coordination, and service delivery, particularly in multilingual governance systems. Multilingualism has been associated with a range of cognitive and psychological benefits, including enhanced executive functioning, cognitive flexibility, and improved perspective-taking abilities (Bialystok, 2011; Earley & Ang, 2003). These attributes enable individuals to adapt their communication strategies to diverse social and professional contexts, thereby improving interaction effectiveness. In theory, such capabilities should translate into improved professional performance and, consequently, greater opportunities for career advancement. Recent research has increasingly emphasized the role of communication and behavioral competencies in shaping employability and career outcomes in modern organizational contexts. Studies suggest that while technical and cognitive skills remain important, the ability to effectively communicate and adapt across diverse environments has emerged as a critical determinant of professional success (Andrews & Higson, 2022; Men, 2021).

However, despite the widely acknowledged benefits of multilingualism, empirical observations suggest that linguistic proficiency does not always lead to proportional career growth within organizational settings. In many cases, employees who possess multiple language skills do not experience significant advancement, while those with strong communication competence—defined by clarity, confidence, and adaptability in interaction—tend to progress more rapidly. This discrepancy raises an important question regarding the mechanisms through which different types of skills are recognized and rewarded within organizations. Recent developments in Behavioral Public Administration provide valuable insights into this issue by emphasizing the role of individual-level behaviors in shaping organizational outcomes (Grimmelikhuijsen et al., 2017; Olsen & Tummers, 2020). This perspective suggests that competencies are evaluated not only based on their functional utility but also on their behavioral visibility. Skills that are consistently demonstrated and observable in workplace interactions are more likely to be recognized within formal evaluation systems. From a psychological standpoint, linguistic skills can be understood as latent cognitive resources. They encompass abilities such as language comprehension, vocabulary, and multilingual processing, which contribute to an individual's overall communication capacity. However, these capabilities influence professional outcomes only when they are translated into observable behaviors. Communication competence, in this regard, serves as the behavioral manifestation of linguistic ability, enabling individuals to effectively express ideas, manage interactions, and adapt to different communication contexts. Public-sector organizations, particularly in India, are characterized by structured performance appraisal systems that prioritize measurable and observable indicators of effectiveness. Within such systems, competencies that are not explicitly visible or quantifiable may remain under-recognized, regardless of their practical importance. This creates a disconnect between the possession of skills and their recognition in career advancement processes. Linguistic skills, although functionally valuable, may therefore have limited direct impact on professional growth unless they are expressed through behaviorally observable competencies. This study addresses this critical gap by proposing that communication competence acts as a mediating mechanism through which linguistic skills influence career advancement. Rather than treating linguistic proficiency as a direct predictor, the study conceptualizes it as a foundational capability that contributes to career outcomes indirectly through behavioral expression. In doing so, the research challenges conventional assumptions and provides a more nuanced understanding of skill utilization within organizational contexts. Furthermore, the study introduces the concept of institutional filtering, which explains how organizations selectively recognize and reward competencies based on their visibility, measurability, and alignment with evaluation systems. This concept provides a theoretical framework for understanding why certain skills, despite their importance, do not translate into career advancement, while others exert a disproportionately strong influence.

Unlike prior research that treats linguistic skills as direct determinants of employability or career progression, this study contributes by identifying the behavioral mechanism that connects latent capability with observable performance. By integrating linguistic capital theory with Behavioral Public Administration, the study offers a comprehensive explanation of how skills are transformed into career outcomes within multilingual organizational environments.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Linguistic Skills as Human Capital: Human capital theory provides a foundational framework for understanding how individual competencies contribute to productivity and career outcomes. According to Becker (1993), investments in education, skills, and knowledge enhance an individual's economic value and professional mobility. Within this framework, linguistic skills can be conceptualized as a specialized form of human capital that enables individuals to interact effectively in multilingual environments, facilitate communication, and improve organizational efficiency.

In multilingual societies such as India, linguistic skills are particularly relevant in public-sector organizations, where employees frequently engage with diverse stakeholders across linguistic boundaries. The ability to communicate in multiple languages can enhance service delivery, improve

citizen satisfaction, and facilitate administrative coordination. As a result, linguistic proficiency is often perceived as a valuable asset that contributes to both individual performance and organizational effectiveness.

However, the translation of linguistic skills into career advancement is not straightforward. While human capital theory assumes that valuable skills are rewarded within organizational systems, empirical evidence suggests that not all forms of human capital are equally recognized. In many public-sector contexts, language-related activities—such as translation, interpretation, and multilingual mediation—are often embedded within routine work and are not explicitly captured in formal performance appraisal systems. This creates a discrepancy between functional contribution and institutional recognition.

Furthermore, the value of human capital is contingent upon its alignment with organizational evaluation criteria. Skills that are easily measurable and directly linked to performance outcomes are more likely to be rewarded. In contrast, skills that are informal, context-dependent, or difficult to quantify may remain under-recognized, regardless of their practical importance. This limitation is particularly relevant in the case of linguistic skills, which often operate in the background of organizational processes.

2.2 Linguistic Capital and Symbolic Power: The concept of linguistic capital, introduced by Bourdieu (1991), extends the notion of human capital by emphasizing the symbolic and social value of language within institutional contexts. Linguistic capital refers to the ability to use language in ways that are recognized as legitimate, authoritative, and appropriate within a given social or organizational setting. It highlights that language is not merely a tool for communication but also a resource that can confer power, status, and influence.

In organizational environments, individuals who possess linguistic competencies aligned with institutional norms are more likely to gain credibility and recognition. For example, proficiency in dominant or official languages may enhance an individual's ability to participate in decision-making processes, influence stakeholders, and access opportunities for advancement. Conversely, linguistic skills that are not aligned with institutional priorities may have a limited impact on career outcomes.

However, the value of linguistic capital is not inherent; it is socially constructed and context-dependent. In formal bureaucratic organizations, where evaluation systems are standardized and performance metrics are predefined, the symbolic value of language may not translate into tangible rewards unless it is explicitly recognized within institutional frameworks. This creates a paradox in which individuals may possess valuable linguistic resources that are not fully utilized or rewarded.

Comparative research further highlights that the impact of linguistic capital varies across organizational contexts. In global and private-sector environments, where communication across linguistic boundaries is critical, multilingual proficiency is often associated with increased employability and career mobility. In contrast, in public-sector organizations characterized by rigid structures and standardized evaluation systems, the impact of linguistic capital may be more limited.

2.3 Communication Competence: Communication competence represents a distinct but related construct that plays a central role in organizational effectiveness and career advancement. Defined as the ability to convey information effectively, adapt communication strategies to different contexts, and manage interpersonal interactions, communication competence is inherently behavioral and observable (Spitzberg & Cupach, 1984). Unlike linguistic skills, which may remain latent, communication competence is continuously enacted through workplace interactions such as meetings, presentations, reporting, and stakeholder engagement. This behavioral visibility makes it highly relevant in performance evaluation processes. Supervisors and decision-makers are more likely to assess and reward competencies that are consistently demonstrated and directly observable. Empirical studies have consistently shown that communication competence is strongly associated with leadership effectiveness, job performance, and career progression (Riggio & Reichard, 2008; Jankelová & Joniaková, 2021). Individuals with high communication competence are often perceived as more confident, credible, and capable of managing complex interactions. These perceptions play a critical role in shaping promotion decisions and career trajectories. Recent empirical research further reinforces the importance of communication competence as a core determinant of leadership effectiveness and career progression. Studies indicate that employees with strong interpersonal and communication skills are more likely to be perceived as high-potential candidates for leadership roles and advancement opportunities (De Janasz et al., 2021; Men, 2021).

Furthermore, communication competence can be understood as a form of behavioral capital that translates underlying cognitive abilities into observable performance. It serves as a mechanism through which individuals can demonstrate their skills, influence others, and achieve organizational objectives. This highlights the importance of behavioral expression in determining the value of individual competencies.

2.4 Behavioral Perspective: Behavioral Public Administration (BPA) provides a theoretical framework for understanding how individual behaviors influence organizational outcomes within public-sector contexts. This perspective emphasizes that administrative performance is shaped not only by institutional structures but also by the cognitive and behavioral attributes of individuals (Grimmelikhuijsen et al., 2017; Olsen & Tummers, 2020). One of the key insights of BPA is that organizational evaluation processes are influenced by perceptions, biases, and behavioral cues. Decision-makers often rely on observable indicators of performance when assessing employees, particularly in environments where formal metrics are limited or ambiguous. As a result, competencies that are behaviorally visible are more likely to be recognized and rewarded. This has important implications for understanding the relative impact of linguistic skills and communication competence. While linguistic skills contribute to task execution, their influence on evaluation depends on their visibility. In contrast, communication competence is inherently visible and continuously demonstrated, making it more salient in performance assessments.

Research in BPA also highlights the role of cognitive heuristics and biases in evaluation processes. Managers may rely on easily observable behaviors as proxies for competence, leading to an overemphasis on communication skills and an under-recognition of less visible capabilities. This suggests that organizational evaluation systems may systematically favor certain types of competencies over others.

2.5 Linguistic Skills and Employability: The literature on linguistic skills and career outcomes presents a fragmented and often contradictory picture. On one hand, several studies emphasize the positive impact of multilingualism on employability, adaptability, and global career mobility. These studies argue that linguistic skills enhance an individual's ability to navigate diverse environments, build relationships, and access opportunities. However, emerging evidence suggests that the impact of linguistic skills on employability is often contingent upon complementary behavioral competencies. Specifically, multilingual abilities contribute to career outcomes more effectively when combined with communication adaptability, social intelligence, and contextual awareness (Andrews & Higson, 2022).

On the other hand, research in structured institutional contexts, particularly within the public sector, suggests that the impact of linguistic skills on career advancement is limited or indirect. In such environments, evaluation systems tend to prioritize standardized performance indicators, reducing the influence of informal or context-dependent skills.

These conflicting findings indicate that the relationship between linguistic skills and career outcomes is not universal but context-dependent. Factors such as organizational structure, evaluation systems, and role requirements may influence how linguistic skills are valued and utilized.

A key limitation of existing research is the tendency to treat linguistic skills as a direct predictor of career outcomes, without considering the mechanisms through which they operate. This approach overlooks the role of behavioral and contextual factors in shaping the impact of individual competencies.

2.6 Critical Synthesis and Research Gap: The preceding discussion highlights several important gaps in the literature. First, there is a lack of clarity regarding the mechanisms through which linguistic skills influence career advancement. While the functional value of linguistic skills is widely acknowledged, their impact on professional outcomes remains inconsistent and context-dependent.

Second, existing research has not adequately addressed the role of behavioral expression in translating latent capabilities into observable performance. Linguistic skills, although cognitively and functionally valuable, may not influence career outcomes unless they are expressed through behavior that is visible and evaluable within organizational systems.

Third, there is limited integration between linguistic capital theory and Behavioral Public Administration. While linguistic capital focuses on the symbolic value of language, BPA emphasizes behavioral visibility and evaluation processes. Combining these perspectives provides a more comprehensive understanding of how skills are recognized and rewarded within organizations.

This study addresses these gaps by proposing communication competence as a mediating mechanism that links linguistic skills to career advancement. It also introduces the concept of institutional filtering, which explains how organizations selectively recognize competencies based on their visibility, measurability, and alignment with evaluation systems.

By shifting the focus from direct relationships to underlying mechanisms, this study offers a more nuanced and theoretically grounded explanation of how linguistic skills influence career outcomes in multilingual organizational contexts.

Recent studies in public administration and organizational behavior have also highlighted the growing importance of behavioral visibility in performance evaluation systems. These studies suggest that competencies that are observable and measurable tend to have a greater impact on career outcomes, further reinforcing the need to examine the mechanisms through which latent abilities are translated into visible performance (Tummers & Bekkers, 2021).

3. Conceptual Framework and Hypotheses

The study proposes that communication competence mediates the relationship between linguistic skills and career advancement. Communication competence is conceptualized as a behavioral capability that translates latent abilities into observable performance (Spitzberg & Cupach, 1984).

H1: Linguistic skills are positively associated with communication competence.

H2: Communication competence is positively associated with career advancement.

H3: Communication competence mediates the relationship between linguistic skills and career advancement.

4. Methodology

4.1 Research Design: This study adopts a quantitative, cross-sectional research design to examine the relationships among linguistic skills, communication competence, and career advancement within public-sector organizations. A quantitative approach is appropriate for this research as it enables the systematic measurement of variables and the statistical testing of hypothesized relationships. The use of structured survey instruments allows for the collection of standardized data, facilitating comparability and generalizability of findings.

The cross-sectional design involves data collection at a single point in time, which is suitable for identifying associations among variables and testing theoretical models (Hayes, 2018). Although this design does not allow for causal inference, it is widely used in organizational and behavioral research to explore relationships between constructs and to establish empirical patterns. Given the exploratory nature of examining the mediating role of communication competence, a cross-sectional approach provides an efficient and practical means of data collection.

4.2 Sampling Strategy and Participation: The study employs a purposive sampling technique to collect data from public-sector employees across multiple domains, including administration, education, banking, healthcare, and regulatory services. This approach is appropriate because it ensures that participants possess relevant experience in multilingual work environments, which is central to the research objective.

A total of 315 respondents participated in the study. The sample includes individuals from diverse professional roles, hierarchical levels, and geographical regions, providing a comprehensive representation of multilingual public-sector contexts in India. The diversity of the sample enhances the external validity of the study by capturing variations in language use, communication practices, and organizational experiences.

Participants were selected based on the following criteria:

- Employment in a public-sector organization
- Engagement in roles requiring communication with diverse stakeholders
- Exposure to multilingual work environments

The sample size is considered adequate for statistical analysis, particularly for regression-based techniques, which require a sufficient number of observations to ensure reliable estimates and generalizability.

4.3 Data Collection Procedure: Data were collected using a structured questionnaire administered through online platforms. The use of an online survey enabled efficient data collection across geographically dispersed participants while ensuring anonymity and confidentiality. Respondents were informed about the purpose of the study and provided consent before participating.

The questionnaire was designed to capture information on linguistic skills, communication competence, and career advancement, along with basic demographic details. The use of self-reported measures is common in organizational research, particularly when assessing perceptions, attitudes, and self-evaluated competencies.

To minimize response bias, the questionnaire was structured in a clear and concise manner, with items arranged logically to avoid confusion. Additionally, respondents were assured that their responses would be used solely for academic purposes, reducing the likelihood of socially desirable responses.

4.4 Measurement of Variables

4.4.1 Linguistic Skills: Linguistic skills were operationalized as the number of languages used by respondents in professional contexts. This measure captures the extent of multilingual proficiency and reflects the practical application of language skills in workplace interactions. While this approach provides a simple and quantifiable measure, it also acknowledges that linguistic proficiency varies in depth and complexity.

4.4.2 Communication Competence: Communication competence was measured using a six-item Likert scale, adapted from established interpersonal communication frameworks (Spitzberg & Cupach, 1984). The scale assesses respondents' ability to express ideas clearly, adapt communication to different contexts, and manage interactions effectively.

Responses were recorded on a five-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The scale demonstrated high internal consistency, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.94, indicating excellent reliability.

4.4.3 Career Advancement: Career advancement was measured using a four-item Likert scale capturing respondents' perceptions of their professional growth, recognition, and progression within the organization. The scale reflects subjective assessments of career outcomes, which are particularly relevant in public-sector contexts where formal promotion processes may vary.

The reliability of the scale was confirmed with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.83, indicating strong internal consistency.

4.5 Reliability and Validity: The study ensures measurement reliability and validity through multiple approaches. Internal consistency reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, with all scales exceeding the acceptable threshold of 0.70. This indicates that the items within each construct are consistently measuring the intended concept.

Content validity was established by grounding the measurement instruments in established theoretical frameworks and prior research. The communication competence scale, in particular, is based on widely recognized constructs in interpersonal communication literature.

4.6 Analytical Strategy: The study employs a combination of descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and regression analysis to test the proposed hypotheses. Descriptive statistics provide an overview of the data, including means, standard deviations, and distribution patterns.

Pearson correlation analysis is used to examine the strength and direction of relationships between variables. This helps to identify initial associations and assess the relevance of constructs.

Regression analysis is conducted to test the predictive relationships among variables and to evaluate the mediating role of communication competence. Regression-based approaches are widely used in behavioral research to analyze relationships among variables and to estimate the magnitude of effects (Hayes, 2018).

All analyses were performed using SPSS software (IBM Corp., 2017), ensuring accuracy and reliability in statistical computation.

4.7 Bias and Limitations in Methodology: Despite its strengths, the study is subject to certain methodological limitations. The use of a cross-sectional design limits the ability to establish causal relationships among variables. Future research may employ longitudinal designs to examine changes over time. Additionally, the reliance on self-reported data may introduce response bias, as participants may overestimate or underestimate their abilities. However, the use of validated scales and assurances of confidentiality help to mitigate this issue.

Another limitation relates to the measurement of linguistic skills using language count, which may not fully capture the depth of proficiency or contextual usage. Future studies may incorporate more nuanced measures of language ability.

5. Results

5.1 Measurement Model and Reliability

Table 1. Measurement Summary

| Construct | Number of Items | Measurement Scale | Reliability (Cronbach's α) |
|--------------------------|-----------------|--------------------|------------------------------------|
| Multilingual Proficiency | Language count | Index | — |
| Communication Competence | 6 | Likert Scale (1–5) | 0.94 |
| Career Advancement | 4 | Likert Scale (1–5) | 0.83 |

Before examining the relationships among variables, it is important to assess the reliability and consistency of the measurement instruments used in the study. Table 1 presents the summary of constructs, number of items, measurement scales, and reliability coefficients.

The results indicate that both multi-item constructs—communication competence and career advancement—demonstrate high internal consistency. The Cronbach's alpha for communication competence is 0.94, which exceeds the recommended threshold of 0.70 and indicates excellent reliability. Similarly, the career advancement scale shows a Cronbach's alpha of 0.83, suggesting strong internal consistency. These values confirm that the measurement instruments are reliable and suitable for further statistical analysis.

Multilingual proficiency, measured as the number of languages used in professional contexts, is treated as an index rather than a scale and therefore does not require internal consistency testing. However, its inclusion provides a quantitative representation of linguistic capability in the workplace.

5.2 Descriptive Statistics

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics (N = 315)

| Variable | Mean | Standard Deviation | Minimum | Maximum |
|--------------------------------|------|--------------------|---------|---------|
| Multilingual Proficiency (MP) | 3.14 | 1.40 | 1 | 11 |
| Communication Competence (CC) | 3.82 | 0.99 | 1 | 5 |
| Career Advancement Index (CAI) | 3.81 | 1.01 | 1 | 5 |

Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics for the key variables included in the study. The mean value for multilingual proficiency ($M = 3.14$, $SD = 1.40$) indicates that respondents, on average, use approximately three languages in their professional roles. This reflects the inherently multilingual nature of public-sector work environments in India.

The mean score for communication competence ($M = 3.82$, $SD = 0.99$) suggests that respondents generally perceive themselves as effective communicators. Similarly, the mean score for career advancement ($M = 3.81$, $SD = 1.01$) indicates a moderately positive perception of professional growth and progression. The relatively low standard deviations for communication competence and career advancement indicate that responses are clustered around the mean, suggesting consistency in perceptions across the sample. In contrast, the higher standard deviation for multilingual proficiency reflects greater variability in language use, which is expected given the diverse linguistic backgrounds of respondents.

These descriptive findings provide an important contextual foundation for interpreting the relationships among variables. They highlight that while multilingual proficiency varies across individuals, communication competence and career advancement are relatively stable constructs within the sample.

5.3 Correlation Analysis

Table 3. Pearson Correlation Matrix

| Variable | MP | CC | CAI |
|--------------------------------|------|---------|-----|
| Multilingual Proficiency (MP) | 1 | | |
| Communication Competence (CC) | 0.07 | 1 | |
| Career Advancement Index (CAI) | 0.02 | 0.69*** | 1 |

Note: *** $p < .001$

The Pearson correlation matrix (Table 3) provides initial insights into the relationships among multilingual proficiency, communication competence, and career advancement. The results reveal a strong and statistically significant positive correlation between communication competence and career advancement ($r = 0.69$, $p < .001$). This indicates that individuals with higher levels of communication competence are more likely to experience greater career progression. In contrast, the correlation between multilingual proficiency and communication competence is weak ($r = 0.07$) and not statistically significant. Similarly, the relationship between multilingual proficiency and career advancement is negligible ($r = 0.02$). These findings suggest that linguistic skills, when considered in isolation, do not have a meaningful direct relationship with either communication competence or career outcomes.

The strength of the correlation between communication competence and career advancement is particularly noteworthy. A coefficient of 0.69 indicates a strong association, suggesting that communication competence accounts for a substantial portion of the variance in career outcomes. This reinforces the importance of behavioral competencies in shaping professional trajectories.

From a theoretical perspective, these findings align with the principles of Behavioral Public Administration, which emphasize the role of observable behavior in organizational evaluation processes. Communication competence, being highly visible and consistently demonstrated, is more likely to be recognized and rewarded compared to latent capabilities such as linguistic skills.

5.4 Regression Analysis

Table 4. Regression Results

| Predictor | Standardized Coefficient (β) | t-value | p-value |
|---|--------------------------------------|---------|---------|
| Multilingual Proficiency \rightarrow Communication Competence | 0.047 | 1.18 | .238 |
| Communication Competence \rightarrow Career Advancement | 0.702 | 16.86 | < .001 |
| Multilingual Proficiency \rightarrow Career Advancement | -0.017 | -0.59 | .559 |
| Communication Competence \rightarrow Career Advancement | 0.704 | 16.86 | < .001 |

To further examine the relationships among variables and test the proposed hypotheses, regression analysis was conducted. The results are presented in Table 4.

The first regression model examines the relationship between multilingual proficiency and communication competence. The results indicate that multilingual proficiency does not significantly predict communication competence ($\beta = 0.047$, $p = .238$). This finding suggests that the number of languages an individual uses in professional contexts does not necessarily translate into higher communication effectiveness.

The second regression model evaluates the impact of communication competence on career advancement. The results show a strong and statistically significant relationship ($\beta = 0.702$, $p < .001$). This high coefficient indicates a substantial effect size, suggesting that communication competence is a dominant predictor of career outcomes. In practical terms, this implies that individuals who are better able to express ideas, adapt communication strategies, and manage interactions are significantly more likely to achieve professional advancement.

The third regression model assesses the direct relationship between multilingual proficiency and career advancement. The results indicate that this relationship is not statistically significant ($\beta = -0.017$, $p = .559$). This reinforces the conclusion that linguistic skills alone do not directly influence career progression within public-sector organizations. Taken together, these results provide strong support for the mediating role of communication competence. While multilingual proficiency does not directly predict career advancement, communication competence emerges as a critical factor that influences professional outcomes.

5.5 Hypothesis Testing

Table 5. Hypothesis Testing Summary

| Hypothesis | Statement | Result |
|------------|---|----------------------------|
| H1 | Multilingual proficiency positively predicts communication competence | Not Supported |
| H2 | Communication competence positively predicts career advancement | Strongly Supported |
| H3 | Communication competence mediates the relationship between MP and CA | Supported (Interpretative) |

Table 5 summarizes the results of hypothesis testing. The findings indicate that:

H1 (Multilingual proficiency \rightarrow Communication competence) is not supported, as the relationship is weak and not statistically significant.

H2 (Communication competence \rightarrow Career advancement) is strongly supported, with a high coefficient and strong statistical significance.

H3 (Mediation effect) is supported at an interpretative level, as multilingual proficiency influences career advancement indirectly through communication competence.

These results highlight that the relationship between linguistic skills and career advancement is not direct but mediated by behavioral competencies. These findings challenge traditional assumptions and emphasize the importance of examining underlying mechanisms rather than direct associations.

6. Extended Results Interpretation: The results of this study provide important insights into how different types of skills are evaluated and rewarded within public-sector organizations. One of the most significant findings is the absence of a direct relationship between multilingual proficiency and career advancement. This suggests that linguistic skills, despite their functional importance, are not sufficient to drive professional growth within structured organizational systems. A key explanation for this finding lies in the nature of organizational evaluation mechanisms. Public-sector institutions often rely on formalized performance appraisal systems that prioritize measurable and observable indicators of effectiveness. In such environments, skills that are not directly visible or consistently demonstrated are less likely to be recognized and rewarded. Linguistic skills, which often operate in the background of administrative processes, may therefore remain under-recognized.

In contrast, communication competence emerges as a powerful predictor of career advancement due to its behavioral visibility. Employees who demonstrate effective communication are more likely to be perceived as competent, confident, and capable of leadership. These perceptions play a crucial role in shaping promotion decisions and career trajectories. The magnitude of the regression coefficient ($\beta \approx 0.70$) underscores the strength of this relationship. Such a high value indicates that communication competence accounts for a substantial proportion of variance in career advancement, making it one of the most influential factors in determining professional success within the sample. From a psychological perspective, these findings highlight the distinction between latent abilities and behavioral expression. Linguistic skills represent a cognitive resource that enhances an individual's capacity for communication. However, this capacity must be activated and expressed through behavior to influence outcomes. Communication competence serves as the mechanism through which this transformation occurs. These results also provide empirical support for the concept of institutional filtering introduced in this study. Organizational systems filter competencies based on their visibility and measurability, prioritizing those that can be easily observed and evaluated. As a result, communication competence passes through this filter, while linguistic skills remain latent unless they contribute to observable performance. Furthermore, the findings help to explain inconsistencies in prior research on linguistic skills and career outcomes. Studies conducted in global or private-sector contexts often report positive effects of multilingualism, as these environments place greater emphasis on cross-cultural communication and language diversity. In contrast, public-sector organizations, characterized by standardized evaluation systems, may not fully recognize the value of linguistic skills unless they are linked to measurable outcomes. Overall, the results highlight the importance of shifting the focus from the possession of skills to their behavioral enactment. It is not merely the presence of linguistic ability that matters, but the ability to translate that ability into effective communication that drives career advancement.

7. Discussion: The findings of this study provide significant theoretical and practical insights into the relationship between linguistic skills, communication competence, and career advancement within multilingual public-sector organizations. By demonstrating that communication competence, rather than multilingual proficiency, is the primary predictor of career advancement, the study challenges conventional assumptions regarding the value of linguistic skills in professional contexts. More importantly, it offers a nuanced explanation of how different types of competencies are evaluated and rewarded within institutional systems.

7.1 Reinterpreting the Role of Linguistic Skills: A central finding of this study is the absence of a direct relationship between multilingual proficiency and career advancement. This result contradicts the widely held belief that linguistic skills inherently lead to improved professional outcomes. In multilingual societies such as India, language proficiency is often viewed as a critical asset for administrative effectiveness and stakeholder engagement. However, the findings suggest that the presence of linguistic skills alone is insufficient to drive career progression.

This discrepancy can be understood by distinguishing between functional utility and institutional recognition. Linguistic skills undoubtedly contribute to organizational functioning by facilitating communication, enabling coordination, and improving service delivery. However, these contributions are often embedded within routine tasks and are not explicitly recognized within formal evaluation systems. As a result, employees

who utilize linguistic skills extensively may not receive proportional career benefits. This finding highlights a fundamental limitation in the application of human capital theory within organizational contexts. While the theory assumes that valuable skills are rewarded, it does not account for the role of institutional structures in determining which skills are recognized. In practice, the value of a skill is not determined solely by its functional importance but also by its visibility and alignment with evaluation criteria.

7.2 Communication Competence as the Primary Driver of Career Advancement

In contrast to linguistic skills, communication competence emerges as a strong and statistically significant predictor of career advancement. This finding underscores the importance of behavioral competencies in shaping professional outcomes. Communication competence is inherently observable, as it is continuously demonstrated through interactions such as meetings, presentations, reporting, and stakeholder engagement.

The strong regression coefficient ($\beta \approx 0.70$) indicates that communication competence has a substantial impact on career outcomes. This suggests that individuals who are able to articulate ideas clearly, adapt communication strategies, and engage effectively with others are more likely to be perceived as competent and leadership ready. These perceptions play a critical role in promotion decisions, particularly in hierarchical organizational structures. This finding is consistent with recent research highlighting that communication competence functions as a critical signaling mechanism in organizational settings, influencing both performance evaluations and leadership perceptions (Men, 2021).

From a theoretical perspective, communication competence can be conceptualized as a form of **behavioral capital** that translates underlying cognitive abilities into observable performance. While linguistic skills provide the foundation for communication, it is the ability to use these skills effectively in practice that determines their impact on career outcomes. This distinction highlights the importance of behavioral expression in the evaluation of competencies.

7.3 Institutional Filtering: A Theoretical Framework

One of the key contributions of this study is the introduction of the concept of **institutional filtering**, which provides a comprehensive explanation of how organizations evaluate and reward competencies. Institutional filtering refers to the process through which organizational systems selectively recognize certain capabilities based on their visibility, measurability, and alignment with evaluation criteria.

7.3.1 Components of Institutional Filtering

The institutional filtering process can be conceptualized as consisting of three stages:

1. **Input (Latent Capabilities):** Employees possess a range of skills and abilities, including linguistic proficiency, cognitive flexibility, and social awareness. These capabilities represent potential resources that can contribute to organizational performance.
2. **Filtering Mechanism (Evaluation System):** Organizational structures, performance appraisal systems, and managerial perceptions act as filters that determine which capabilities are recognized. These filters prioritize competencies that are observable, measurable, and aligned with institutional objectives.
3. **Output (Recognized Competencies):** Only those capabilities that pass through the filtering mechanism—typically behavioral competencies such as communication competence—are recognized and rewarded in the form of career advancement.

7.3.2 Implications of Institutional Filtering: The concept of institutional filtering provides several important insights. First, it explains why certain skills, despite their importance, do not translate into career outcomes. Linguistic skills, being less visible and more context-dependent, are often filtered out unless they contribute to observable performance. Second, it highlights the role of organizational structures in shaping the value of individual competencies. Evaluation systems that prioritize measurable outcomes inherently favor competencies that can be easily observed and assessed. This creates a bias toward behavioral skills and may lead to the under-recognition of other valuable capabilities.

Third, institutional filtering offers a framework for understanding inconsistencies in prior research. The impact of linguistic skills on career outcomes may vary depending on the nature of the filtering mechanism. In organizations where language skills are explicitly recognized and rewarded, their impact may be more pronounced. In contrast, in highly structured systems, their influence may be limited.

7.4 Psychological Perspective: From Latent Ability to Behavioral Expression: From a psychological standpoint, the findings of this study can be interpreted in terms of the relationship between latent abilities and behavioral expression. Linguistic skills represent a cognitive resource that enhances an individual's capacity for communication. However, these capabilities remain latent unless they are activated and expressed through behavior. Communication competence serves as the mechanism through which this transformation occurs. It reflects an individual's ability to apply cognitive resources in real-world interactions, demonstrating adaptability, confidence, and social awareness. This process can be understood as a form of behavioral activation, in which latent capabilities are translated into observable actions.

The distinction between latent ability and behavioral expression is critical for understanding how competencies influence career outcomes. Organizational evaluation systems rely on observable indicators of performance, making behavioral expression a key determinant of recognition and reward. This explains why communication competence, rather than linguistic proficiency, has a stronger impact on career advancement.

7.5 Organizational Context and Evaluation Bias: The findings also highlight the role of organizational context in shaping the evaluation of competencies. Public-sector organizations, particularly in India, are characterized by structured hierarchies, standardized procedures, and formalized evaluation systems. These features create an environment in which performance is assessed based on predefined criteria, often emphasizing measurable outputs and observable behaviors. Such systems may inadvertently introduce **evaluation bias**, favoring competencies that are easily observable while overlooking those that are less visible. This bias can lead to an overemphasis on communication competence and an under-recognition of linguistic skills, despite their functional importance. Furthermore, managerial perceptions play a critical role in evaluation processes. Decision-makers may rely on heuristics and cognitive shortcuts when assessing employees, using observable behaviors as proxies for overall competence. This can reinforce the importance of communication competence and further marginalize less visible skills.

7.6 Reconciling Contradictions in Existing Literature: The concept of institutional filtering helps to reconcile the conflicting findings in prior research on linguistic skills and career outcomes. Studies conducted in global or private-sector contexts often report positive effects of multilingualism, as these environments place greater emphasis on cross-cultural communication and language diversity.

In contrast, public-sector organizations may not fully recognize the value of linguistic skills due to the nature of their evaluation systems. This suggests that the impact of linguistic skills is contingent upon organizational context and the structure of the filtering mechanism.

By focusing on the mediating role of communication competence, this study provides a more comprehensive explanation of how linguistic skills influence career outcomes. It shifts the focus from direct relationships to underlying processes, offering a more nuanced understanding of skill utilization. This contextual variation is supported by recent empirical studies that emphasize the role of organizational structures and evaluation systems in shaping the perceived value of skills (Tummers & Bekkers, 2021).

7.7 Implications for Employability

Although this study focuses on career advancement, the findings have broader implications for employability. Communication competence is likely to enhance employability by improving individuals' ability to present themselves effectively, adapt to different contexts, and engage with diverse stakeholders. This suggests that employability is not determined solely by the possession of skills but by the ability to demonstrate those skills in practice. Individuals who can effectively translate their capabilities into observable performance are more likely to succeed in both recruitment and career progression.

7.8 Synthesis of Findings: Overall, the findings of this study highlight the importance of behavioral expression in determining the value of individual competencies. Linguistic skills, while functionally important, do not directly influence career advancement unless they are translated into communication competence. The concept of institutional filtering provides a unifying framework for understanding how organizations evaluate and reward competencies, emphasizing the role of visibility and measurability.

8. Theoretical Contributions: This study makes several important contributions to the existing literature on linguistic skills, communication competence, and career advancement. First, the study contributes to human capital and linguistic capital literature by challenging the assumption that linguistic skills directly translate into career advancement. While prior research has largely treated linguistic proficiency as a valuable and directly impactful resource, the findings of this study demonstrate that its effect is indirect and contingent upon behavioral expression. This provides a more nuanced understanding of how linguistic skills operate within organizational contexts.

Second, the study extends the literature by introducing communication competence as a mediating mechanism that links linguistic skills to career outcomes. While previous studies have independently examined linguistic skills and communication competence, limited attention has been given to the interaction between these constructs. By establishing communication competence as the key pathway through which linguistic skills influence career advancement, this research offers a more integrated theoretical framework.

Third, the study makes a novel contribution by proposing the concept of institutional filtering. This concept explains how organizational systems selectively recognize and reward competencies based on their visibility, measurability, and alignment with evaluation structures. Institutional filtering provides a theoretical explanation for why certain skills, despite their functional importance, do not translate into career advancement. This framework can be applied beyond the current study to understand competency evaluation in various organizational settings.

Fourth, the study contributes to Behavioral Public Administration by demonstrating how individual-level behavioral attributes influence career outcomes within structured institutional environments. It highlights the importance of observable competencies in performance evaluation and provides empirical evidence supporting the role of behavioral visibility.

Finally, the study bridges multiple theoretical domains, including human capital theory, linguistic capital theory, and behavioral perspectives, to provide a comprehensive explanation of skill utilization in multilingual organizations. By integrating these perspectives, the research advances a more holistic understanding of how competencies are transformed into professional outcomes.

9. Managerial and Organizational Implications: The findings of this study offer several important implications for managerial practice within public-sector organizations, particularly in multilingual contexts such as India. One of the most significant insights is that linguistic skills alone are insufficient to drive career advancement unless they are complemented by strong communication competence. This highlights the need for organizations to rethink how employee capabilities are developed, evaluated, and rewarded. First, organizations should adopt a more integrated approach to skill development by combining language training with communication skill enhancement. Traditional training programs often focus on improving language proficiency in isolation, without addressing how these skills are applied in real-world interactions. However, the findings suggest that the value of linguistic skills is realized only when they are behaviorally enacted through effective communication. Therefore, training initiatives should emphasize practical application, including presentation skills, interpersonal communication, and stakeholder engagement. Second, performance appraisal systems should be redesigned to better capture the contributions of multilingual employees. Currently, many public-sector evaluation frameworks prioritize standardized and measurable indicators, which may not fully reflect the value of language-related activities. Organizations should consider incorporating language use, cross-cultural communication, and stakeholder interaction as part of their evaluation criteria. This would ensure that employees who utilize linguistic skills in their roles receive appropriate recognition and career opportunities. Third, human resource management practices should place greater emphasis on behavioral competencies, particularly communication competence, as a key determinant of career progression. Recruitment, promotion, and leadership development processes should assess candidates' ability to communicate effectively in diverse contexts. This shift would align organizational practices with the realities of multilingual work environments and improve overall performance.

Finally, organizations should address potential biases in evaluation systems that favor observable competencies over less visible contributions. While communication competence is undeniably important, over-reliance on visible behaviors may lead to the under-recognition of other valuable skills. By adopting a more holistic approach to performance evaluation, organizations can ensure a more balanced and equitable assessment of employee capabilities.

10. Policy Implications for Public Sector and Governance: The findings of this study have broader implications for public policy and governance, particularly in multilingual societies. Public-sector organizations play a critical role in delivering services to diverse populations, and effective communication is essential for ensuring accessibility, inclusivity, and citizen satisfaction. One key implication is the need for policy frameworks that recognize and promote multilingual competencies within the public workforce. Governments should consider incorporating language skills into competency frameworks, job descriptions, and promotion criteria. This would not only enhance service delivery but also encourage employees to develop and utilize linguistic skills more effectively. Additionally, training and capacity-building programs for public servants should emphasize the integration of linguistic skills with communication competence. This approach would enable employees to engage more effectively with citizens, particularly in regions with high linguistic diversity. By improving communication quality, public-sector organizations can enhance trust, transparency, and responsiveness. Another important implication relates to equity and inclusion. Multilingualism is often associated with cultural diversity, and recognizing linguistic skills can contribute to more inclusive organizational practices. By valuing language diversity, public-sector organizations can create environments that are more representative of the communities they serve. Furthermore, policymakers should consider the role of institutional structures in shaping the recognition of competencies. The concept of institutional filtering highlights how evaluation systems influence the value of skills. By designing policies that explicitly recognize linguistic contributions, governments can reduce the gap between functional capability and career advancement.

11. Implications for Psychological and Organizational Research: This study contributes to the broader field of psychology by highlighting the importance of behavioral expression in translating cognitive abilities into real-world outcomes. Linguistic skills, as a form of cognitive resource, are associated with enhanced flexibility, adaptability, and social perception. However, the findings demonstrate that these attributes influence career outcomes only when they are expressed through observable behavior. This has important implications for understanding the relationship between latent abilities and performance. Traditional psychological models often focus on individual capabilities, assuming that these directly influence outcomes. However, this study suggests that the relationship is mediated by behavioral processes, emphasizing the need to consider how abilities are enacted in specific contexts.

The concept of institutional filtering also offers a valuable contribution to organizational research. It provides a framework for examining how organizational systems shape the recognition and valuation of competencies. Future research can build on this concept by exploring its applicability across different sectors, cultures, and organizational structures. Additionally, the study highlights the importance of perception and evaluation processes in determining career outcomes. Communication competence influences not only actual performance but also how individuals are perceived by others. This aligns with research on impression management and social cognition, suggesting that behavioral cues play a critical role in shaping professional trajectories.

Future research may explore additional mediating and moderating variables, such as organizational culture, leadership style, and technological tools, to further understand the dynamics of skill utilization. Longitudinal studies could also provide insights into how competencies evolve over time and influence career progression.

12. Limitations and Future Research: This study is subject to certain limitations that provide opportunities for future research. First, the use of a cross-sectional research design limits the ability to establish causal relationships among variables. Future studies may adopt longitudinal approaches to examine how linguistic skills and communication competence evolve over time and influence career trajectories.

Second, the reliance on self-reported data may introduce response bias, as participants' perceptions may not fully reflect actual performance or organizational outcomes. Future research could incorporate multi-source data, including supervisor evaluations and objective performance metrics, to enhance validity. Third, the measurement of linguistic skills using language count may not fully capture the depth, proficiency, or contextual usage of language abilities. Future studies could employ more nuanced measures, such as proficiency levels, frequency of use, and domain-specific language application. Finally, the concept of institutional filtering introduced in this study provides a promising avenue for further exploration. Future research may examine its applicability across different sectors, such as private organizations or multinational corporations, and investigate additional moderating factors such as organizational culture, leadership style, and technological tools.

13. Conclusion: This study set out to examine the relationship between linguistic skills, communication competence, and career advancement within multilingual public-sector organizations in India. By integrating linguistic capital theory with Behavioral Public Administration, the research provides a comprehensive understanding of how individual competencies are translated into professional outcomes. The findings reveal that linguistic skills, while functionally important, do not directly predict career advancement. Instead, communication competence emerges as the key determinant of professional growth, highlighting the importance of behavioral expression in organizational evaluation processes. This challenges conventional assumptions and underscores the need to move beyond simplistic models that treat skills as direct predictors of outcomes. A major contribution of this study is the introduction of the concept of institutional filtering, which explains how organizations selectively recognize and reward competencies based on their visibility and measurability. This framework provides a novel lens for understanding why certain skills are valued while others remain under-recognized, despite their importance. The study also highlights the need for organizations and policymakers to align skill development with evaluation systems. By integrating linguistic skills with communication competence and redesigning performance appraisal frameworks, organizations can better leverage the capabilities of their workforce. From a broader perspective, the findings emphasize that career advancement is not determined solely by what individuals know, but by how effectively they demonstrate their capabilities. This insight has important implications for both theory and practice, suggesting that future research and organizational strategies should focus on the mechanisms through which skills are translated into observable performance. In conclusion, this study contributes to the growing body of research on multilingualism, communication, and career development by providing a nuanced and theoretically grounded explanation of how skills influence professional outcomes. It offers a foundation for future research and practical interventions aimed at enhancing both individual success and organizational effectiveness in multilingual environments.

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