

## HOW LINGUISTIC CAPITAL INFLUENCES OVERTIME PAY AMONG LOW-SKILLED MIGRANT WORKERS IN MALAYSIA: A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF BANGLADESHI WORKERS

### *COMO O CAPITAL LINGUÍSTICO INFLUENCIA O PAGAMENTO DE HORAS EXTRAS ENTRE TRABALHADORES MIGRANTES POUCO QUALIFICADOS NA MALÁSIA: UM ESTUDO QUALITATIVO SOBRE TRABALHADORES DE BANGLADESH*

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**Jie Weng\***

\*Faculty of Economics and Management, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Bangi, Selangor, Malaysia  
Orcid: <https://orcid.org/0009-0006-7992-4805>  
[wengtomm2@gmail.com](mailto:wengtomm2@gmail.com)

**Suchana Das\***

\*Faculty of Economics and Management, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Bangi, Selangor, Malaysia  
Orcid: <https://orcid.org/0009-0005-2783-9839>  
[suchana.das5100@gmail.com](mailto:suchana.das5100@gmail.com)

**Yongyu Lu\***

\*Faculty of Economics and Management, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Bangi, Selangor, Malaysia  
Orcid: <https://orcid.org/0009-0006-2110-9330>  
[luyongyu0408@gmail.com](mailto:luyongyu0408@gmail.com)

**Liang Zuo\*\***

\*\*Center for Research in Language and Linguistics, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Bangi, Selangor, Malaysia  
Orcid: <https://orcid.org/0009-0009-8130-1182>  
[306994483@qq.com](mailto:306994483@qq.com)

**Nur-E-Alam Siddique\*\*\***

\*\*\*College of Business Administration, IUBAT- International University of Business Agriculture and Technology, Uttara Model Town, Dhaka, Bangladesh  
Orcid: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3032-0887>  
[siddique\\_0612@hotmail.com](mailto:siddique_0612@hotmail.com)

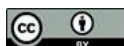
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#### **Abstract**

Drawing on Bourdieu's linguistic capital theory, this study utilized semi-structured inter-views with 76 low-skilled Bangladeshi workers in Malaysia to explore how language capability influences the overtime pay. The findings suggest that linguistic capital acts as an informal threshold in the allocation of overtime pay through three mechanisms: communication efficiency, opportunity screening, and competency-based trust. This study extends research on linguistic capital by demonstrating how language skills influence the informal income distribution of low-skilled foreign workers. This study contributes to the literature on linguistic capital and labor inequality by

#### **Resumo**

Com base na teoria do capital linguístico de Bourdieu, este estudo utilizou entrevistas semiestruturadas com 76 trabalhadores bangladeshis pouco qualificados na Malásia para explorar como a capacidade linguística influencia o pagamento de horas extras. Os resultados sugerem que o capital linguístico atua como um limiar informal na alocação do pagamento de horas extras por meio de três mecanismos: eficiência da comunicação, triagem de oportunidades e confiança baseada na competência. Este estudo amplia a pesquisa sobre capital linguístico, demonstrando como as habilidades linguísticas influenciam a distribuição informal de renda de trabalhadores



reconceptualizing language capability as an informal institutional mechanism embedded in managerial practices through which overtime opportunities and income advantages for low-skilled foreign workers are unevenly distributed.

**Keywords:** Low-skilled Worker. Foreign Worker. Language Proficiency. Income. Qualitative Research.

*estrangeiros pouco qualificados. Este estudo contribui para a literatura sobre capital linguístico e desigualdade trabalhista, reconceituando a capacidade linguística como um mecanismo institucional informal incorporado às práticas gerenciais, por meio do qual as oportunidades de horas extras e as vantagens de renda para trabalhadores estrangeiros pouco qualificados são distribuídas de forma desigual.*

**Palavras-chave:** Trabalhador Pouco Qualificado. Trabalhador Estrangeiro. Proficiência Linguística. Renda. Pesquisa Qualitativa.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

As an important manufacturing hub in Southeast Asia, Malaysia occupies a central position in labour-intensive industries such as electronics, textiles, rubber products and automobiles (Yusof, 2003). The production system is maintained through a large number of low-skilled foreign workers (Devadason, 2021).

In Asia, countries such as Bangladesh and Myanmar have become major exporters of labour to both developed and developing countries such as Singapore, Japan and Malaysia (Dannecker, 2013). For Malaysia, foreign labour is particularly important in the manufacturing and construction sectors (Devadason, 2021) due to the short supply of local labour, with many Malaysians uninterested in these types of work (Abdul-Rahman et al., 2012). The outcome is Malaysia relies heavily on foreign labor, and foreign workers contributing to economic development (Mat Rawi, 2024), and the number of such workers having reached 5.5 million (Peters et al., 2022). Of the foreign labour groups in Malaysia, the largest is from Indonesia, followed by Bangladesh and the Philippines. These workers are mainly employed in the manufacturing, construction and service industries (Karim et al., 1999).

In Malaysia's multilingual context, Malay is the official language (Powell, 2020) while English is also widely used in communication (Wah Kam, 2003). Thus, in this environment, Indonesian workers face no major problems because Indonesian and Malay come from the same language family (Soderberg & Olson, 2008). Meanwhile, English is

the second official language for Filipino workers, so they can use English for work-related communication (Lesho, 2018). However, the third-largest group, Bangladeshi workers, face more difficulties due to the significant differences between their native language and both English and Malay. Therefore, from the perspective of linguistic capital, Bangladeshi workers are naturally weaker than the other two groups.

As Industry 4.0 drives the digitalisation and intelligent transformation of manufacturing, the operational logic of factories is also evolving, placing higher demands on the technical adaptability and communication skills of workers. In Malaysia's foreign labour system, which is highly dependent on foreign labour, language capabilities are gradually becoming a key factor influencing the division of labour and shift-scheduling decisions (Ne'Matullah et al., 2022). This applies especially in situations involving flexible working hours and sudden adjustments to production capacity, such as overtime arrangements, where workers' language capabilities directly affect their ability to effectively understand work instructions and complete collaborative tasks.

In comparison, workers from the Philippines and Indonesia have linguistic advantages in actual production because either their languages are similar to Malay or they have a certain level of English proficiency. Although Bangladesh is the third-largest source of labour, Bangladeshi workers often face communication barriers in task coordination and sudden scheduling changes due to significant differences between their own language systems and that of their workplace. This disadvantage in linguistic capital not only limits their job choices in daily work processes but may also cause additional income gaps in the distribution of overtime opportunities.

Although existing studies have widely documented the positive association between language proficiency and wages among foreign workers, this literature has predominantly conceptualized language as an individual-level human capital that enhances productivity, employability, or earnings through improved communication efficiency (Baik, 2025). As a result, language capability is typically treated as a measurable skill whose economic returns can be estimated.

This study argued that this perspective is insufficient to explain earnings differentials in environments characterized by informal work arrangements, weak institutional regulation, and flexible labour deployment-conditions that are particularly pronounced in low-skill manufacturing environments in developing economies. In these

environments, earnings differentials are not only determined by formal wage structures, but are increasingly shaped by informal mechanisms such as overtime pay allocation, task delegation, and trust-based role allocation. However, how language capability plays a role in these informal organizational processes remains under-researched theoretically.

Drawing on Bourdieu's theory of linguistic capital, this study reconceptualizes language capability not only as a personal resource, but also as an informal institutional mechanism embedded in everyday managerial practices. Specifically, we propose that linguistic capital serves as an implicit threshold that structures access to overtime opportunities through three interrelated pathways: communication efficiency, opportunity screening, and competency-based trust. Through these mechanisms, language capability becomes a key criterion for supervisors to assess workers' ability of deployment, reliability, and eligibility for additional revenue-generating tasks, even in the absence of a formal language requirement.

By focusing on low-skilled Bangladeshi migrant workers in Malaysian manufacturing, this study extends linguistic capital theory in three important ways. First, it shifts the analytical focus from formal wage determination to informal income distribution, emphasizing overtime pay as a critical but neglected component in the reproduction of inequality. Second, it shows how linguistic capital functions as a form of informal governance at the organizational level, influencing task allocation and trust formation under conditions of uncertainty and time pressure. Third, by showing how language-based advantages persist even among workers with comparable formal skills and job roles, it advances the understanding of labor stratification in multilingual workplaces. As a result, this study sought to answer the following research question (RQ): *“How does language capability influence overtime pay among Bangladeshi workers in Malaysia?”*

To answer this question, this research followed a qualitative approach and referred to the protocol devised by Merriam and Tisdell (2009). Collectively, the research objective was to explore the influence of linguistic capital on the wages of low-skilled Bangladeshi workers. In terms of the qualitative research, semi-structured interviews were conducted to collect data. The study highlights the role of linguistic capital in providing opportunities to the wage. The remainder of the paper is structured as follows: Section 2 presents the literature and relevant theory used in this study. Section 3 discusses

the research methodology and research design. Section 4 presents the main findings. Section 5 highlights the propositions and framework. Section 6 presents the conclusions from the findings, including the implications from both theoretical and practical perspectives.

## **2 LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Linguistic capital and manufacturing industry**

In manufacturing industry, the role of linguistic capital is multifaceted, influencing innovation, productivity, employee development, and organizational performance. Research has shown that language skills play a crucial role in communication, knowledge sharing, innovation and competitive advantage, especially in the context of digital transformation of manufacturing and globalized markets (Aljuboori et al., 2021). However, the influence of linguistic diversity is complex, and while it can foster innovation and adaptability, it can also create communication barriers that can reduce productivity, especially in environments with a more diverse workforce (Dale-Olsen & Finseraas, 2020). And these negative influences tend to diminish as employees' language capabilities improve.

Moreover, linguistic capital, as part of broader intellectual capital, is increasingly argued to be a driver of innovation, agility and competitive advantage in manufacturing (Rehman et al., 2022). Despite these advances, research on the direct influence of linguistic capital on manufacturing remains limited, with the majority of studies focusing on the broader framework of intellectual capital, and few studies exploring linguistic capital separately for manufacturing-related practitioners (Ahmed et al., 2022; Hanifah et al., 2022).

Despite these insights, existing research in manufacturing and organizational contexts has largely conceptualized language capability as a functional resource that enhances coordination, knowledge sharing, or productivity (Ahmad, 2018). This instrumental perspective, while valuable, implicitly assumes that language functions neutrally to increase efficiency rather than as a mechanism for the reproduction of power, opportunity, and exclusion within organizations (Wilmot, 2024). As a result, the role of

linguistic capital in shaping unequal work opportunities, especially in the context of informal and casual arrangements, remains under-theorized.

## **2.2 Language capability and income of low-skilled workers**

The relationship between language capabilities and income opportunities has long been a central topic in labour economics. Chiswick and Miller (1995) found that in a multilingual labour market, workers with dominant language capabilities generally have more opportunities to receive a higher income because, the authors argued, workers with good language skills tend to have lower communication costs and stronger organisational adaptability, and they are more likely to assume additional responsibilities.

In a study of British migrant low-skilled workers, Dustmann and Fabbri (2003) found that each one-level increase in English proficiency could increase their average wage by 7-10%. Similar results have also been found in studies of foreign workers in the U.S. (Bleakley & Chin, 2004), Australia (Güven & Islam, 2015) and Germany (Hahm & Gazzola, 2022).

Language capability influences not only whether workers can complete their work tasks but also whether they can be trusted by their superiors and assume supervisory or semi-skilled positions (Presbitero, 2020; Tenzer et al., 2014). Workers lacking language capabilities are often considered “unassignable” or “uncommunicative” and thus restricted to the lowest salary levels. Hahm and Gazzola (2022) found native German speakers with English language skills earn on average 13% more, while Rozhkova and Roshchin (2019) found that in Russia, foreign language skills can lead to a 9% wage premium for employees. Moreover, language capability also determines whether workers can participate in wage negotiations and access promotion opportunities. Liwiński (2019) found that in Poland, proficiency in a foreign language can lead to an average salary premium of 11%, with Spanish (32%), French (22%) or Italian (15%) commanding a higher premium than English (11%) or German (12%). Meanwhile, Güven and Islam (2015) pointed out that language capability has a significant positive influence on salary. Therefore, some scholars have suggested that even among workers with similar skill levels, language proficiency may determine access to better-paying or more frequent overtime opportunities (Hahm & Gazzola, 2022). Thus, exploring the role of language

capability in the distribution of overtime pay can help deepen the understanding of income inequality among low-skilled workers in the manufacturing industry.

While these studies convincingly demonstrate a “language premium” in formal wage outcomes, to a large extent they consider earnings as a static, contractually defined variable. This focus ignores the fact that for low-skilled migrant workers, earnings are often constituted through informal and contingent channels such as overtime, task-based bonuses, and temporary assignments. As a result, there is still insufficient research on how language capability determines the mechanisms for accessing these informal income opportunities, rather than just the basic wage.

### **2.3 Language capability and overtime**

Extensive empirical research shows that foreign workers with dominant language capabilities are more likely to earn higher wages, have stable jobs and enjoy better promotion opportunities (Carliner, 1981; Chiswick & Miller, 1995; Lønsmann & Kraft, 2018; Ridala, 2020). This ‘language premium’ phenomenon has been confirmed in contexts such as Europe, the United States, and Australia, indicating that language capability has become a key component of human capital that influences income differences (Boyd & Cao, 2009; Churkina et al., 2023; Guven & Islam, 2015).

Building on this, overtime work in particular presents a sensitive organisational node where trust, immediacy and comprehension converge—all of which are mediated by language capability. On this basis, researchers began to focus on the influence of language capabilities on informal income channels (such as overtime, performance bonuses and part-time arrangements). Presbitero (2020) pointed out that language capabilities and communication skills significantly influence whether members can assume additional tasks and informal coordination responsibilities. Language barriers can undermine trust within teams, influence how organisations judge the abilities of their employees, and ultimately affect the likelihood of these workers being given additional responsibilities and rewards (Chen et al., 2006; Tenzer et al., 2021).

Existing research has preliminarily revealed the mechanism of language capability in ‘work overtime’. Overtime arrangements rely on real-time communication and rapid responses in practice (Ingels & Maenhout, 2018). Workers with weak language

capabilities are at a disadvantage in terms of understanding instructions, responding to notifications, and complying with safety requirements, so they may be excluded from informal arrangements (Lindhout et al., 2019). These findings suggest that language capabilities are not only a determinant of wage levels but also influence workers' access to informal income opportunities (such as overtime). However, while empirical research has highlighted this inequality, little attention has been directed to the potential theoretical mechanisms that explain why and how language creates structural disadvantages in this context. The following section introduces the theory of linguistic capital as a conceptual framework to explain these phenomena.

While previous research has acknowledged that language capability influences participation in additional tasks and responsibilities, overtime work itself has rarely been examined as a distinct organizational domain governed by informal rules and discretionary decision-making. Existing research tends to consider overtime as a quantifiable extension of working hours or a technical scheduling problem, thereby ignoring its social and organizational dimensions. This leaves open the question of how language capability, reliability and trustworthiness-based evaluations influence access to overtime in daily management practices.

## **2.4 Underpinning theory**

For this research context, the appropriation of language capability and income opportunity in manufacturing industry aligns with linguistic capital. Linguistic capital, as theorised by Bourdieu (1991), refers to the symbolic and functional value of an individual's language capabilities in social interactions (Bourdieu, 1991), especially in social or economic situations that require effective communication. These capabilities can translate into real advantages in employment, salary, and promotion (Sung-Yul Park & Wee, 2013).

The influence of linguistic capital is particularly significant in multilingual societies like Malaysia. Malay, as the official language, and English, as the widely used lingua franca, together form the dominant workplace languages (Idris & Ismail, 2023; Nair-Venugopal, 2000). However, the large number of foreign workers who speak neither

the local language nor English means that they are at a disadvantage in terms of language capabilities and thus in the overall labour market (Ubalde & Heyman, 2021).

As manufacturing companies have pursued digitalization processes since entering the 21st century, this has led to a rising demand for digital system operation and cross-team communication skills, which further amplifies the importance of linguistic capital (Tenzer & Pudelko, 2012). For the large number of Bangladeshi workers in low-skilled jobs, their insufficient language capabilities limit not only their opportunities for training and skills upgrading but also their mobility into higher-income or semi-skilled positions.

Therefore, this study adopted linguistic capital as a theoretical perspective to explore how differences in language capabilities influence the income opportunities of Bangladeshi workers in the context of the Malaysian manufacturing industry. This study emphasises that language is not only a tool of communication but also a form of social capital embedded in workplace structures and labour stratification.

## 2.5 Research gaps

In summary, existing studies provide valuable insights into the relationship between language capability, productivity and wage outcomes. However, there are two limitations to these studies, at the theoretical and methodological levels, respectively.

Most current research on manufacturing industry and the workforce is based on human capital theory or technology adoption models (e.g., the TAM or TOE), emphasising the role of skills training and technology learning (L. Li, 2024; Miah *et al.*, 2024). However, relatively less discussion has focused on how linguistic capital operates in manufacturing organisations and how it determines whether workers are excluded from or included in a technological transformation system. Bourdieu (1991) proposed that linguistic capital, as a form of symbolic capital, may create exclusion and inequality through implicit workplace mechanisms, but this perspective has not been fully explored with regard to manufacturing industry research. Especially in a multilingual and multi-ethnic country like Malaysia, the ways that inequalities in language capabilities are intertwined in the labour hierarchy, digital production and wage distribution processes is an overlooked theoretical intersection.

Second, previous studies have focused mainly on formal wage structures, ignoring informal channels of income, such as overtime, through which income inequality is actually produced and reproduced among low-skilled workers. Thus, the role of language in accessing these opportunities remains theoretically invisible.

In addition, although existing research recognises the influence of language capability on labour market outcomes (Chiswick & Miller, 1995), few studies have applied this framework to the digital context of manufacturing, with a particular focus on the organisational experiences and structural marginalisation pathways of foreign workers. Therefore, there is an urgent need to combine language capital theory with the issue of labour reproduction in the context of manufacturing industry, expanding the social dimension of the current research on industrial transformation.

Methodologically, most studies involving manufacturing industry adopt quantitative methods such as surveys and economic modelling, focusing on analysing technology adoption strategies and return on investment at the enterprise level (Bhuiyan, 2024; Jayashree *et al.*, 2021). Although some studies address the issue of workforce training, they mostly start from the perspective of enterprises and lack micro-level examinations of the subjective experiences, language challenges, and informal adaptation strategies of foreign workers (Lee *et al.*, 2022; Widiarti *et al.*, 2024). Much of the existing literature on language capabilities utilises measures like language tests or self-assessment scales, ignoring how languages are “used” and “excluded” in the workplace and how they create “hidden barriers” through organisational systems (M. Li & Zhang, 2021). Especially in a cross-cultural work environment, language exclusion is not just a matter of skills but also a complex interaction of power, communication, cultural capital and institutional arrangements (Thuesen, 2017; Wilmot *et al.*, 2024). Although survey-based methods can provide useful macro-level insights, quantitative research often fails to capture the qualitative richness of how language barriers are experienced, addressed and institutionalised in everyday workplace interactions. To understand these deep structures, qualitative methods such as in-depth interviews, participatory observation or linguistic narrative analysis must be used; additionally, the linguistic adaptation of low-skilled foreign workers in the manufacturing industry in developing countries has been under-researched, and there is a lack of qualitative research designs based on the theory of linguistic capital. Therefore, this study attempted to bridge the current research gaps at

the micro level and the subjective experience level from the perspective of workers by using qualitative interviews.

### 3 METHODOLOGY

This section may be divided by subheadings. It should provide a concise and precise description of the experimental results, their interpretation, as well as the experimental conclusions that can be drawn.

#### 3.1 Data collection

A qualitative research methodology was adopted through a semi-structured interview protocol (Appendix A). To ensure the validity and reliability of the protocol, the researchers discussed it with two professionals and one academic expert in employee and human resources systems.

Purposive sampling was used to select respondents from among the low-skilled foreign workers in various manufacturing companies in Malaysia. In this study, the definition of 'low-skilled workers' was based on a combination of the International Labour Organization's (ILO) classification of skill levels (ISCO-08), based on major groups nine and eight, as well as the actual employment characteristics of the Malaysian manufacturing industry. The specific criteria were as follows:

- 1) The highest level of education attained by the respondents before starting work was secondary school, and they had not undertaken formal higher education, vocational training or industry certification programmes.
- 2) Respondents are mainly engaged in physically intensive and highly repetitive positions, such as assembly line workers, packers, warehouse and transport workers, cleaners or support staff. Their jobs do not involve advanced equipment programming, quality control or technical management tasks.
- 3) No specific professional qualifications, technical certifications or proof of language capabilities are required for employment; the work does not require complex cognitive operations or advanced language capabilities.

- 4) Based on the local statutory minimum wage, the individual has long been at the bottom of the company's salary structure.

Based on the above criteria, interviews were held with a total of 90 Bangladeshi low-skilled workers employed in the manufacturing industry in Malaysia. They were mainly engaged in factory operations, assembly, packaging or other similar positions.

The interviews were conducted in native language, which is Bengali, with the assistance of an interpreter to ensure that the interviewees could express themselves freely in a comfortable language environment. After the data was collected, the responsible person in the research team translated the Bengali into English and submitted it to a professional translator for checking. This research followed

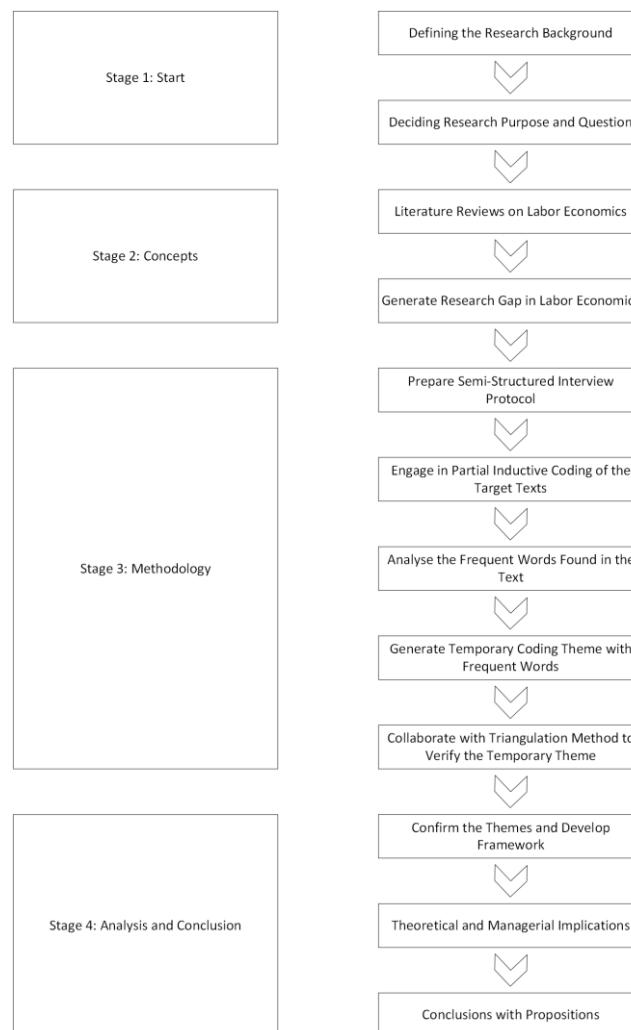
All the interviews were recorded with the interviewees' consent and transcribed verbatim after the interview. To protect the interviewees' privacy, all identifying information was anonymized.

### 3.2 Data analysis

In qualitative research, data saturation is an important concept for assessing whether the sample size is sufficient and the analysis results are solid. Interviews were conducted with a total of 76 foreign low-skilled workers employed in the manufacturing industry in Malaysia. The sample size was set based on the principle of information sufficiency, which refers to the point in the data collection process when no new information or themes are provided by new interviews, observations or document analysis (Lu *et al.*, 2024).

After collecting the raw data through semi-structured interviews, the researchers adopted Gioia's methodology to understand the influence of linguistic capital on overtime pay for low-skilled workers (Gioia *et al.*, 2013). Additionally, a four-stage research design was used, which was adopted from Gopaldas (2016) and Kawamoto *et al.* (2023) (see Figure 1). Further, Gioia's methodology was chosen to develop a primary protocol for the influence of linguistic capability on overtime payment for low-skilled workers, along with open, axial and selective coding (Corbin & Strauss, 2012). The development of concepts resulted in nine items under three main themes. The propositions were developed based on discussions of all the cases.

**Figure 1**  
*Research Design*



### 3.3 Trustworthiness and ethical considerations

A preliminary interpretation of the interviews and a summary of the identified themes were shared with the participants for their feedback and approval. To ensure the reliability of the findings, the results and final themes were also reviewed by peer reviewers, experts and core researchers familiar with the study. To minimize potential bias from the researcher conducting the interviews, the data were coded and analyzed by other authors, not the first author (Shufutinsky, 2020). Additionally, the participants' personal information would remain confidential in line with their requests for anonymity,

security and privacy. Furthermore, this study was approved by International University of Business Agriculture and Technology (IUBAT) for research purposes.

## 4 FINDINGS

The following section describes the results of the analysis, whereby low-skilled foreign workers in Malaysia answered questions about how their language capabilities influence their employment opportunities and wages (Gioia *et al.*, 2013). The list of themes included (i) communication, (ii) opportunities and (iii) trust. These themes were elaborated on to explain how linguistic capital could influence the overtime pay of low-skilled workers.

### 4.1 Communications

In manufacturing, overtime pay is an important source of additional income for low-skilled workers. However, overtime assignments often involve temporary scheduling, rapid responses and limited supervisory resources. Therefore, organisations tend to prioritise workers with low communication costs and high execution efficiency when assigning overtime. Language capability has become a key factor influencing overtime availability.

Language capabilities improve the task comprehension and response speed of workers, enabling them to complete overtime tasks independently without relying on translation or supervision. This communication efficiency translates into a higher willingness to schedule overtime at the organisational level, reflecting the functional role of linguistic capital in actual production arrangements (Lindhout *et al.*, 2019; Tenzer & Pudelko, 2012).

In addition, language barriers significantly reduce task fit while increasing accident risks and coordination costs, thereby excluding those with low language capabilities from overtime arrangements (Selten & Warglien, 2007). Therefore, linguistic capital not only influences whether overtime work can be completed but also determines whether one is perceived as capable of undertaking such work. Table 1 displays quotes and codes related to the theme of communication.

**Table 1***Themes and codes identified under communication*

Selective Code	Axial Code	Open Code	Interviewee Code
Communication	Understanding	I was able to follow what the supervisor was asking us to do, and I was able to have a brief work briefing with them. <i>Open Code: Follow job description</i>	W12
	Responding	After the supervisor has explained the work content, I can complete it quickly without waiting for a translation. <i>Open Code: Quickly start to work</i>	W22
	Dependence	After the supervisor has completed the work assignment, I can complete the task independently without them having to translate the work content again. <i>Open Code: Work independently</i>	W28

## 4.2 Opportunity

Language capabilities are not only reflected at the execution level but also embedded in the organisational structure for allocating overtime and skilled overtime opportunities. Linguistic capital manifests itself here as an informal qualification filter (Dustmann & Fabbri, 2003). That is, although the organisation does not openly set language requirements, in practice, language capabilities have become a key factor in determining who is eligible to participate in high-yield tasks. This is consistent with the mechanism pointed out by (Presbitero, 2020) that ‘language capabilities increase participation in additional responsibilities and compensation opportunities.’

In addition, Rozhkova and Roshchin (2019) found that even among groups with similar skill levels, language capabilities can entail a 9%–11% wage premium. This difference derives from not only basic wages but also differences in the distribution of

overtime and informal incentive systems. Table 2 displays related quotes and codes on the theme of opportunity.

**Table 2**

*Themes and codes identified under opportunity*

Selective Code	Axial Code	Open Code	Interviewee Code
	Task	Once there is an urgent task, my supervisor asks me to work extra hours and pays me more overtime than others. <i>Open Code: Urgent task</i>	W16
Opportunity	Training	New machines have arrived at the factory, and my supervisor has asked me and the Indonesian workers to stay after work to learn how to use them, promising to pay us overtime. <i>Open Code: Learning manual operation for new machines</i>	W29
	Participation	Every time there is overtime work, my supervisor asks me to join because I can understand basic Malay and English. <i>Open Code: More chances to work overtime</i>	W44

### 4.3 Trust

Workers with language capabilities often obtain higher levels of responsibility, such as team coordination or on-site organisational roles during overtime. This empowerment reflects the organisation's structural trust assessment mechanism for language capabilities. That is, such capabilities have become a signal for identifying the manageability and eligibility of workers.

This trust is not only based on actual language capabilities but also stems from their positive spillover effects on the stability of organisational operations. According to Connelly *et al.* (2018), competence-based trust has a higher efficiency value than character-based trust in task-intensive fields. Linguistic capital has a dual meaning here: on the one hand, it improves task delivery efficiency, and on the other hand, it strengthens the organisation's positive perception of individuals, thereby indirectly allowing income growth and internal rank advancement to be achieved (Bourdieu, 1991). Table 3 displays related quotes and codes on the theme of trust.

**Table 3**

*Themes and codes identified under trust*

Selective Code	Axial Code	Open Code	Interviewee Code
Trust	Reliability	My supervisor highly recognises my language ability, so every time I work overtime, he assigns me to be the team leader for the Bangladeshi workers and gives me extra pay. <i>Open Code: Recognition of language ability</i>	W18

#### 4.4 Development of propositions and frameworks

In a multilingual manufacturing environment, overtime tasks are often characterised by tight deadlines, their ad hoc nature and insufficient supervisory resources. When arranging overtime, organisations tend to select workers who can quickly understand the work content and complete tasks independently. Staff with language capabilities need not rely on translation or additional explanations, and they are more likely to be identified as quickly deployable human resources.

This task execution efficiency becomes a practical manifestation of linguistic capital, playing a decisive role in scheduling decisions. As (Tenzer & Pudelko, 2012) pointed out, language barriers weaken team cognitive consistency and increase misunderstandings and conflicts, thus affecting collaborative performance. Lindhout *et*

*al.* (2019) further noted that language barriers not only affect efficiency but also increase safety risks, making organisations more inclined to choose employees with strong language capabilities for overtime arrangements

*P1: Low-skilled workers with high linguistic capital are more likely to be selected for overtime work due to their stronger task comprehension, response efficiency and lower supervision costs*

Although a company might not stipulate language capability thresholds in its written regulations, in practice, supervisors give priority to employees with stronger language capabilities when assigning overtime work, especially in situations involving technical learning, equipment operation or rapid response tasks. This selection logic reflects an informal opportunity threshold that gives linguistic capital an opportunity allocation function.

Dustmann and Fabbri (2003) found that for every higher level of language proficiency gained by migrant workers, their average wages increased by 7–10%; part of this difference came from frequent participation in overtime and temporary tasks. Presbitero (2020) also emphasised that language capabilities increase the likelihood of employees assuming additional responsibilities and receiving rewarding tasks. In addition, in their study in Russia, Rozhkova and Roshchin (2019) found that even with consistent skill levels, language capabilities significantly influence opportunities to participate in technical work

*P2: As a non-institutionalised but structurally embedded screening mechanism, linguistic capital significantly increases low-skilled workers' chances of getting high-paying overtime work and training for skilled overtime work.*

Overtime work is not only physically demanding but often involves on-site coordination, team organisation and cross-language communication. In such situations, supervisors tend to assign organisational roles to workers with language communication skills. Language capability thus becomes a key basis for establishing competence-based trust. It also significantly influences whether workers receive additional leadership responsibilities and financial rewards for overtime work.

Connelly *et al.* (2018) distinguished between competence-based and character-based trust, pointing out that the former is particularly critical in task-intensive, time-sensitive environments. In their study of international companies, Tenzer *et al.* (2014)

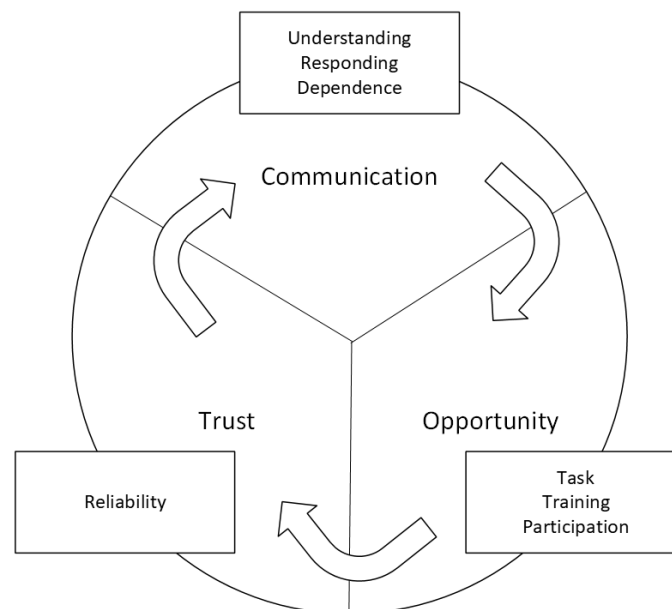
found that language capabilities are a decisive factor influencing team trust and role division. Bourdieu (1991) further posits that language capability is not only a technical tool but also an important resource for organisational stratification and the reconstruction of symbolic values.

*P3: Linguistic capital enhances managers 'trust in workers' abilities, thereby increasing their chances of being assigned high-responsibility overtime work and receiving additional financial rewards.*

Based on the findings of this research, three propositions were established to develop a framework, which is presented in Figure 2.

**Figure 2**

*Linguistic capability influences overtime pay*



## 5 DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Language capabilities have a highly structural significance in multilingual workplaces. They are no longer merely a communication tool; they are deeply involved in the organisational logic of task allocation, role empowerment and informal income distribution (Bourdieu, 1991; Tenzer *et al.*, 2014). In workshop environments lacking formal norms and institutional safeguards, linguistic capital gradually transforms into a

key resource that influences overtime availability, role assignability and trustworthiness (Connelly *et al.*, 2018). Its function is reflected not only in operational efficiency gains but also the profound shaping of opportunity accessibility and role value (Dustmann & Fabbri, 2003).

As an important channel for low-skilled workers to improve their economic resilience, overtime pay is subject to systematic influences from language capabilities and shows a trend of structural differentiation (Rozhkova & Roshchin, 2019). Specifically, those with strong language capabilities are more likely to secure urgent tasks, skilled tasks, and roles that require organisational trust, thereby enabling such staff to obtain more frequent and remunerative overtime income (Presbitero, 2020). This informal but institutionalised distribution mechanism has not been fully explained in the existing literature on labour markets and organisational behaviour. In particular, language capabilities have evolved into a form of real power in developing economies, multilingual labour contexts and industries where flexible working hours are prevalent (Chiswick & Miller, 1995).

The revelation of this mechanism helps expand the functional boundaries of linguistic capital in organisational structures. It also provides a more explanatory perspective for understanding income opportunity differences among low-skilled migrant workers in informal labour fields (Bourdieu, 1991).

Importantly, the mechanisms identified here are likely to extend to other labour-intensive industries and migrant-dependent economies where informal work arrangements are prevalent, such as in construction, logistics, agriculture, and service industries in developing countries and emerging economies (Bar-Haim & Birgier, 2024; Demirel *et al.*, 2021; Fellows *et al.*, 2023). In these contexts, language capability may similarly serve as an informal institutional threshold that constrains access to high-value jobs, training opportunities, and supplemental income channels. Thus, while the empirical setting of this study is specific, the underlying process by which linguistic capital constructs inequality is not.

At the same time, the scope of this study is constrained by important boundary conditions. The salience of linguistic capital as an informal institutional mechanism may depend on organizational contexts such as high time pressure, limited monitoring resources, and lack of transparent allocation rules. In highly standardized production

systems with automated scheduling, strong unionization, or formal overtime rotation mechanisms, the role of linguistic capital in influencing the allocation of overtime may be diminished. Similarly, where language training is institutionalized or multilingual coordination is formally supported, linguistic disadvantage may not translate directly into income inequality.

By explicitly articulating these scope conditions, this study avoids considering linguistic capital as a universally dominant determinant of labour outcomes. Instead, it emphasizes the situational embeddedness of language-based inequality and the importance of examining how organizational structures, institutional safeguards, and managerial discretion work together to shape the translation of linguistic capital into organizational management.

The following section systematically explores the mechanism of the role of linguistic capital on the path to overtime pay from the perspectives of theoretical contributions and practical implications. Moreover, feasible management and policy responses are proposed.

### **5.1 Implications for theory**

The study reveals how linguistic capital profoundly influences low-skilled workers' access to overtime opportunities and informal remuneration within informal institutional arrangements in organisations. This mechanism is not only related to the efficiency of communication within organisations but also manifests itself as a socially embedded selection logic that transforms language capabilities into task qualifications, trust signals and structural opportunity thresholds (Bourdieu, 1991; Tenzer *et al.*, 2014). In workplaces where institutional rules are lacking or vague, linguistic capital becomes an important basis on which organisations assign tasks and allocate trust, which in turn influences the actual income levels and career mobility of low-skilled workers.

First, the study emphasises how linguistic capital is actually used by organisations as an informal screening criterion in the allocation of overtime tasks, which forms an informal but effective stratification mechanism for low-skilled workers. Since most factories have no transparent selection systems for overtime arrangements, in order to reduce communication costs and risk expectations, supervisors often use language

capabilities to judge which of their staff can quickly understand urgent tasks, who is easier to communicate with and who is more controllable (Lindhout *et al.*, 2019; Presbitero, 2020). This allows workers with strong language capabilities to obtain high-value overtime opportunities more frequently, while those with weak language capabilities face a structural dilemma of passive waiting and marginalisation (Rozhkova & Roshchin, 2019).

Second, the embedding of linguistic capital into organisational trust mechanisms constructs a perception logic of symbolic capability. Managers often establish a direct link between language capability, work reliability, task comprehension and even a sense of responsibility, so they are more inclined to assign workers with strong language capabilities to coordinate tasks or lead teams in overtime scenarios (Connelly *et al.*, 2018). These informal roles usually entail additional compensation, indirectly promoting the accumulation of income and prestige inequality. For low-skilled workers, language capabilities are not only a tool for survival but also form an identity label in the organisational hierarchy, influencing their eligibility to become trusted individuals.

In addition, the study deepens the understanding of the access to opportunity mechanism in the labour field. Traditional studies often attribute differences in overtime pay for low-skilled workers to their experience, job type or contract type (Chiswick & Miller, 1995). However, this study points out that even among workers in the same section and with the same job, language capabilities can significantly influence whether or not they are assigned to high-intensity overtime shifts. This differential allocation mechanism is based on language performance rather than formal assessment, constituting a soft exclusion logic and manifesting as non-institutionalised yet highly systematic marginalisation (Dustmann & Fabbri, 2003).

Overall, linguistic capital not only affects the communication effectiveness of low-skilled workers but also systematically influences their task visibility, role eligibility and trustworthiness within the organisation. This perspective has promoted the shift of linguistic capital research from cultural sociology to labour sociology, and it provides a new theoretical framework for explaining the inequality of opportunities for low-skilled workers in informal income systems.

## 5.2 Implications for practice

The study found that linguistic capital has become an important screening mechanism that determines whether low-skilled workers can access high-paying overtime work. This has key practical implications for front-line managers and human resource managers in non-technical manufacturing companies. Especially in the absence of a formal scheduling system, striking a balance between efficiency and fairness has become an important issue for the sustainable operation of organisations.

The institutional role of language capability in scheduling logic reveals that the allocation of overtime opportunities in manufacturing enterprises is not entirely neutral. When faced with a multilingual workforce, organisational managers often tend to prioritise workers with stronger language capabilities for high-value overtime tasks in order to reduce communication barriers and improve task execution efficiency. However, this implicit screening criterion may inadvertently create a language monopoly that excludes linguistically disadvantaged workers from high-return tasks, resulting in informal but systematic inequality (Tenzer *et al.*, 2014). To establish a more inclusive on-site management system, companies should implement transparent scheduling mechanisms, such as rotating overtime assignment systems, language-coordinated task design and training for schedulers to identify language biases. These interventions would not only enhance overall organisational efficiency but also strengthen employee identification and loyalty in a diverse workforce.

## 6 CONCLUSION

The existing research generally neglects the role of linguistic capital in overtime tasks and informal income distribution in non-technical organisations. In particular, there is a lack of systematic theoretical exploration of and empirical research on how language capabilities, firstly, are embedded in scheduling processes and, secondly, influence organisational trust building and role authorisation, especially in low-skilled labour markets. Focusing on this theoretical blind spot, this study used qualitative research combined with linguistic capital theory to reveal how language capabilities have become

a key variable influencing workers' access to overtime opportunities in actual operations, further shaping the income disparity structure among workers.

In addition, linguistic capital is closely related to the formation of competence-based trust within organisations. Workers with strong language capabilities are often assigned informal roles such as coordinators and team leaders. Although not formally appointed, these positions entail more opportunities to engage in high-value tasks. Therefore, overtime pay is not only compensation for time but also reflects the organisation's recognition of an individual's symbolic competence. Language is the core medium in the process of constructing this competence.

The core contribution of this study lies in expanding the boundaries of the application of linguistic capital theory to organisational behaviour and revealing its role in informal income distribution. Meanwhile, it also promotes organisational research to focus on the synergistic operation of language capabilities in informal work mechanisms, providing a new analytical dimension for understanding structural inequality in the labour field.

### **AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS**

YYL and SD were responsible for conceptualization , methodology , data collection and validation, formal analysis, investigation, data curation, writing original draft preparation, reviewing and editing, and project supervision. MNES was responsible for reviewing, editing and translation proofreading. LZ was responsible for conceptualization and data curation. Author 1 and author 2 contributed equally to this article.

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## INFORMED CONSENT STATEMENT

All participants have been informed of the purpose of the study and have provided written consent to publish the results without any personal identifying information.

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## APPENDIX A

**Table A1**

*Interview Questions*

No	Questions
1	What is your current level of English/Malay?
2	Why do you practice your English/Malay?
3	How does it influence your job scope?
4	How does it influence your income opportunities?
5	How does it influence your work opportunities?

### **Authors' Contribution**

All authors contributed equally to the development of this article.

### **Data availability**

All datasets relevant to this study's findings are fully available within the article.

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