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## Employability and Mobility of Saudi Literature and Linguistics Graduates in a Transforming Labor Market

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**ABSTRACT:** *This empirical study integrates national labor market data with primary research to assess employability and mobility among Saudi Literature and Linguistics graduates under Vision 2030. Considering National Labor Observatory reports for benchmarks on employment rates, transition duration, and salary levels, the study combines these indicators with survey data from 200 graduates, employer evaluations from 50 employers, and qualitative focus groups. Descriptive statistics, logistic regression, t tests, and thematic analysis were conducted. In the sample, 37% of graduates were employed at the time of data collection, with a mean job search duration of 285 days and starting salaries below the national average. Internship participation and willingness to relocate were significant predictors of employment status. Employers rated graduate preparedness significantly lower than graduates' self-assessments, particularly in digital literacy and applied bilingual proficiency. The findings demonstrate that employability outcomes are shaped by measurable competencies and structurally patterned mobility conditions in regionally concentrated labor markets.*

**Keywords:** employability, employer perceptions, graduate mobility, labor market transitions, language and linguistics graduates, Saudi Arabia

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## INTRODUCTION

Graduate employability has become a central indicator of the effectiveness of higher education, particularly in contexts where economic transformation reshapes labor market structures. Moreover, graduate mobility is increasingly recognized as a structural determinant of access to employment, especially in labor markets characterized by regional concentration and an uneven distribution of opportunities (Tomlinson & Holmes, 2017; Venhorst & Cörvers, 2018). Recent scholarship in international higher education further highlights that employability outcomes are increasingly shaped by institutional strategies, postgraduation transitions, and access to opportunity structures in evolving labor markets (Xu et al., 2025; Jolly et al., 2025). In reform-oriented economies, employability and mobility are interdependent: graduates' ability to relocate often influences the quality of job matches, wage trajectories, and access to expanding sectors (Drejer et al., 2021; Tomlinson & Nghia, 2022). Within Saudi Arabia, Vision 2030 links human capital development with private-sector growth, regional diversification, and workforce participation, positioning graduate employability and mobility as strategic policy priorities (Vision 2030, 2016; Aljohani, 2023; AlMahmoud, 2025).

Recent national data highlight discipline-specific disparities in early career outcomes. In 2022, Saudi universities graduated more than 200,000 bachelor's students, of whom 38,406 (approximately 19%) were in the arts and humanities fields (National Labor Observatory, 2023a). Within this group, 1,862 graduates specialized in literature and linguistics. Employment outcomes vary substantially across disciplines: Fashion, Interior, and Industrial Design graduates reported a 69% employment rate, and History and Archaeology graduates reported 56%, compared with 44% among Literature and Linguistics graduates (National Labor Observatory, 2023a). These differences demonstrate that humanities graduates do not constitute a homogeneous group and that discipline-specific analysis is necessary. International education indicators also emphasize the importance of aligning higher education outputs with labor-market participation benchmarks (OECD, 2022).

Beyond overall employment rates, transition timing and wage differentials reveal structural positioning within the labor market. Approximately 75% of Literature and Linguistics graduates did not secure employment within 12 months of graduation (National Labor Observatory, 2023a). In contrast, graduates in applied and STEM-related fields experience shorter transition periods and stronger integration into expanding private-sector industries (National Labor Observatory, 2023b). The average starting salary for Arts and

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Humanities graduates, including Literature and Linguistics, was approximately 4,400 Saudi riyals per month, compared with a national bachelor's average of 5,400 riyals, and the average job search duration reached 289 days, compared with 274 days nationally (National Labor Observatory, 2023b). International research links slower transitions and lower starting wages to sectoral segmentation and constrained geographic mobility in concentrated labor markets (Drejer et al., 2021; Tomlinson & Nghia, 2022). In Saudi Arabia, where private-sector growth is concentrated in major metropolitan regions, mobility becomes structurally consequential for accessing higher-quality employment streams (National Labor Observatory, 2024).

Although employability research increasingly recognizes the interaction between individual competencies, institutional alignment, and employer expectations (Tomlinson & Holmes, 2017; Eimer & Bohndick, 2023), several gaps remain. First, most Saudi studies aggregate humanities disciplines, limiting the understanding of variation within specific fields (National Labor Observatory, 2023a; Gashgari, 2021). Second, mobility is often acknowledged as contextually relevant but rarely operationalized as a central explanatory factor in Gulf-based employability research, particularly in relation to gendered mobility constraints (Venhorst & Cörvers, 2018; Li, 2025). Third, comparative analysis of employer evaluations and graduate self-assessments remains limited, restricting insight into potential signaling gaps or alignment mismatches.

To address these gaps, the present study focuses specifically on Saudi literature and linguistics graduates and integrates graduate perspectives, employer evaluations, and national labor data within a multilevel analytical framework. The study examines the following research questions:

RQ1: How do employability outcomes for Saudi Literature and Linguistics graduates compare with those of other disciplines in terms of employment rates, wages, and job search duration?

RQ2: What structural, geographic, and sociocultural factors shape mobility and employment outcomes for these graduates?

RQ3: How do employer evaluations of graduate preparedness compare with graduates' self-assessments?

By linking discipline-specific outcomes with mobility conditions and stakeholder perceptions, this study contributes to the theoretical refinement of employability models in regionally concentrated labor markets. In practice, it informs curriculum alignment and the integration of applied skills within humanities programs. At the policy level, it offers evidence relevant to workforce diversification strategies in Saudi Arabia and comparable Global South contexts characterized by gendered participation and uneven regional opportunity distribution.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

To understand employability in specific fields, we need to consider both theories and actual data from various labor markets. Because employability and mobility are closely connected in concentrated markets, this review combines research

on employability models, mobility, and market concentration, along with studies from the Middle East. These topics provide the foundation for examining literature and linguistics graduates in Saudi Arabia.

### **Conceptual Models of Graduate Employability**

The USEM describes employability in terms of understanding, skills, confidence, and self-awareness, stressing that subject knowledge and transferable skills are key to finding a job (Yorke & Knight, 2004). Earlier analyses of higher education reform in Saudi Arabia also underscore the need to better prepare graduates for future labor market demands amid regional and economic transitions (Alwasal & Alhadlaq, 2012). Later research added career management, adaptability, and self-directed learning as important for handling changing job markets (Bridgstock, 2009; Tomlinson, 2012).

Recent studies question models that focus only on individuals. Employability is now seen as a relationship determined by employer signals, institutional reputation, market demand, and how opportunities are shared (Tomlinson & Holmes, 2017; Eimer & Bohndick, 2023). Empirical evidence from Saudi business education contexts similarly highlights employers' emphasis on applied skills, communication, and practical readiness over purely theoretical knowledge (Alshareef & Yunusa-Kaltungo, 2024). Reviews emphasize that skills alone do not guarantee a job; success depends on how well graduates' abilities fit market needs (Artess et al., 2017). Research also shows that internships and work-integrated learning increase job prospects, but only when they are relevant and supported by employers (Mseleku, 2024; Alzahrani et al., 2024). This means that models should include both personal effort and organizational factors.

### **Mobility and Labor Market Concentrations**

Mobility is now a key link between graduate skills and job opportunities. In concentrated economies, the ability to move frequently influences how well graduates find good jobs and earn higher wages (Venhorst & Cörvers, 2018; Drejer et al., 2021). Graduates who move to large cities usually have better employment outcomes, particularly in fields without clear local career paths. Studies from the UK context similarly show that internal migration after graduation is associated with upward occupational mobility and improved job match quality (Wielgoszewska, 2018). Recent work on research on mobility placements further suggests that structured mobility experiences can enhance transferable skills and professional development in higher education contexts (Ng et al., 2025).

However, mobility is not the same for everyone. Financial resources, housing costs, social duties, and family responsibilities influence relocation choices and can limit access to opportunities (Assaad & Arntz, 2005; Tomlinson & Nghia, 2022). In Global South countries, limited mobility is associated with

underemployment and slower income growth, especially among graduates in nontechnical fields. The results support the idea that employability is closely tied to geographic opportunities. Research on international students' career expectations and how mobility relates to employability shows that opportunities to work postgraduate are key drivers of mobility choices and perceived career readiness (Nilsson & Ripmeester, 2016).

In Saudi Arabia, where private-sector expansion is concentrated in major city centers, mobility becomes structurally significant for graduates seeking higher-quality employment (National Labor Observatory, 2024). However, empirical work rarely examines mobility as an explanatory variable in discipline-specific employability studies. Instead, mobility is often treated as a background condition rather than a measurable factor that impacts outcomes.

### **Graduate Transitions in the Middle East**

In the Middle East, graduates find jobs in markets shaped by public sector dominance, regional differences, and cultural expectations. Studies in Saudi Arabia show that private-sector employers especially value practical bilingual skills, digital abilities, and workplace readiness (Gashgari, 2021; Alzahrani et al., 2024). Studies examining employment challenges in Saudi Arabia have identified attitudinal and structural barriers that influence youth labor market integration (Kumar et al., 2019). However, opinions about humanities graduates are mixed, with concerns often concentrating on their practical readiness rather than their conceptual knowledge.

Gender further intersects with mobility and employability. Women represent a substantial proportion of humanities graduates in Saudi Arabia, yet employment participation and geographic mobility patterns differ across gender groups. International and regional studies suggest that recruitment practices, caregiving expectations, and social norms can influence mobility decisions and access to sectors (Assaad & Arntz, 2005; Li, 2025; Alanazi et al., 2023). Despite this evidence, discipline-specific comparisons of employer evaluations and graduate self-assessments remain limited in the regional literature.

### **Identified Gaps and Concepts**

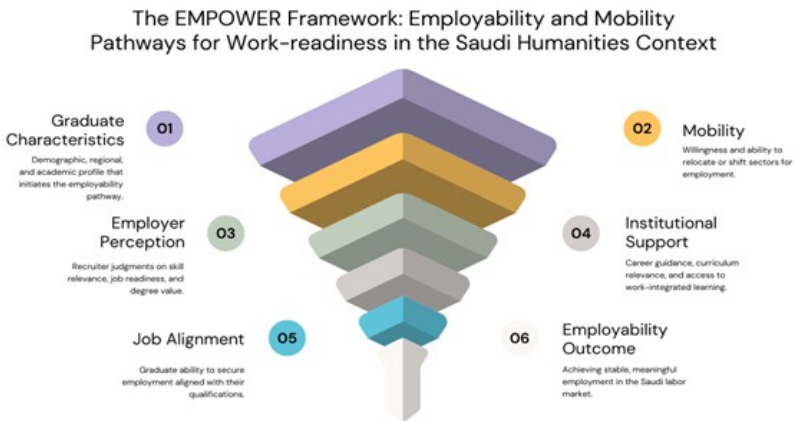
The reviewed scholarship highlights three gaps relevant to the present study. First, most employability research in Saudi Arabia aggregates humanities graduates into a single category, limiting the understanding of discipline-specific variation (National Labor Observatory, 2023a; Tomlinson & Holmes, 2017). Second, although mobility is widely acknowledged as important in concentrated labor markets, it is rarely operationalized as a central analytical factor in Gulf-based employability research. Third, direct comparisons between employer evaluations and graduates' self-reported competencies remain limited, limiting insight into whether observed disparities reflect skill deficits, signal mismatches, or reflect organizational limitations.

To address these gaps, this study uses a multilevel framework that combines individual skills, employer expectations, institutional support, mobility constraints, and broader labor market factors. This approach is utilized through the EMPOWER framework.

### **Conceptual Framework: The EMPOWER Model**

The EMPOWER framework views employability as the result of five interacting factors: individual skills and agency, employer expectations, institutional support, mobility constraints, and labor market structures. Unlike older models that focus mostly on graduate traits, EMPOWER highlights how the distribution of opportunities and geographic mobility shape job transitions. The EMPOWER framework is presented in Figure 1, which illustrates how these domains interact to shape discipline-specific employability outcomes.

**Figure 1. The EMPOWER Framework for Graduate Employability and Mobility**



Conceptual diagram illustrating the EMPOWER framework, showing interconnected domains linking individual competencies, employer expectations, institutional support, mobility limitations, and broader labor market structures.

This system guided the design of survey topics and focus group questions, as well as the mix of quantitative and qualitative methods. The next section explains the research design, sampling, tools, and analysis used to answer RQ1, RQ2, and RQ3.

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## METHODOLOGY

This section describes the research design, philosophical approach, sampling methods, instruments, procedures, analysis techniques, and ethical safeguards used to study employability and mobility among Literature and Linguistics graduates in Saudi Arabia. The method closely followed the EMPOWER framework and the three research questions to interpret labor market outcomes in relation to structural and contextual factors.

### **Research Design and Philosophical Paradigm**

In this study, a convergent parallel mixed-methods design was used to collect quantitative and qualitative data concurrently, analyze them separately, and then combine the results during interpretation (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). It followed a critical realist view, which holds that outcomes such as job levels and wages are determined by more fundamental structural factors, including sector concentration, institutional fit, and sociocultural limits. This means that employability and mobility are not just personal traits but are elements of broader opportunity systems. The integrated-methods approach allowed us to model workforce trends statistically and examine the underlying causes through qualitative analysis. Quantitative data addressed RQ1 and parts of RQ2 through modeling employment and mobility, whereas qualitative data helped explain structural barriers and employer views for RQ2 and RQ3. Combining these conclusions helps us understand how personal actions and structures interact in labor market transitions specific to the discipline.

### **Population and Sampling**

The target population consisted of Saudi nationals who earned a bachelor's degree in the literature or linguistics between 2020 and 2024, as well as employers who had hired or supervised humanities graduates within the previous three years. Purposive sampling was used to ensure representation among gender, geographic region, employment status, and sector. The inclusion criteria required graduates to have completed a literature or linguistics degree within the specified period and employers to have recent recruitment experience involving humanities graduates. The final sample included 200 graduates and 50 employers. Among graduates, 66 percent were female and 34 percent were male; 71 percent resided in major metropolitan regions, and 29 percent resided in outlying regions. The employment sectors included public institutions (49 percent), private organizations (41 percent), and other or nongovernmental entities (10 percent). Among employers, 44 percent were female and 56 percent male, with involvement across the public and private sectors and geographic regions. Sample sizes for graduates were determined using regression-based guidelines, assuming a medium effect size, whereas the employer sample was guided by qualitative saturation. Recruitment occurred through alum databases, professional networks, LinkedIn, X, WhatsApp groups, and direct

organizational outreach (Gashgari, 2021). Findings are interpreted as analytically informative rather than statistically generalizable.

## **Research Setting**

The study took place across Saudi Arabia during a period of structural labor market change driven by Vision 2030 reforms. Private-sector growth is concentrated in major cities such as Riyadh, Makkah, and the Eastern Province, while many humanities graduates still work in the public sector. Components such as sector division, regional concentration of opportunities, and gender norms affect early career paths. This setting is ideal for exploring how employability and mobility interact inside a labor market formed by these structural differences.

## **Instruments**

Three tools were used to collect data—a graduate survey, an employer survey, and a semistructured focus group protocol—which were all coordinated with the EMPOWER framework. The graduate survey measured perceived employability preparedness, transferable skills, institutional support, career confidence, willingness to relocate, employment outcomes, and demographic information. Questions were adapted from established employability measures (Bridgstock, 2009; Tomlinson, 2012) and translated into Arabic using back-translation to guarantee cultural accuracy. Expert reviews and cognitive interviews led to minor wording changes, and pilot testing showed strong internal consistency (Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.88$ ). The employer survey assessed graduate preparedness, written communication, digital skills, workplace readiness, and skill alignment using Likert-type scales, plus open-ended questions about strengths and gaps. We held six semistructured focus groups with 40 participants to explore institutional preparation, mobility limits, employer expectations, and ideas for program improvement. All tools were clearly linked to the EMPOWER domains to match RQ1, RQ2, and RQ3.

## **Data collection procedures**

Data collection took place from January to June 2025. Surveys were conducted online using Qualtrics and Google Forms, and focus groups were held online on Zoom, which lasted 60 to 75 minutes. With participants' consent, the sessions were audio-recorded and transcribed exactly. Data collection continued until no new themes emerged regarding mobility and employability. Participation was voluntary, and the respondents could withdraw at any time. Recruiting through networks involved coordinating multiple electronic platforms, such as alumni databases and professional social media groups, leading to uneven response rates across regions and sectors. Scheduling virtual focus groups was also difficult because of participants' work schedules and time

zone differences across Saudi Arabia. Although online surveys made participation easier, differences in digital access and response rates required reminders to reach our target sample sizes. These problems were managed by extending recruitment periods and providing flexible scheduling.

### **Data Analysis**

Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS version 27. Descriptive statistics were computed for employment status, wages, job search duration, and preparation ratings. Binary logistic regression modeled employment status as the dependent variable, with internship participation and willingness to relocate as primary predictors, alongside relevant control variables. Model adequacy was evaluated using the Nagelkerke R-square test, the Hosmer–Lemeshow test, and classification correctness. Independent samples t tests were used to compare graduate and employer preparedness ratings, and effect sizes were calculated using Cohen’s *d* to assess practical magnitude. Qualitative data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke’s six-phase thematic analysis, with inductive coding of transcripts to identify patterns related to employability experiences, mobility limitations, institutional support, and employer alignment. NVivo software facilitated coding management, and the intercoder reliability exceeded 0.80 for a 20% subsample, as measured by Cohen’s kappa. Quantitative and qualitative findings were integrated during interpretation to identify convergence and divergence across data strands.

### **Trustworthiness and Rigor**

Quantitative thoroughness was ensured through pilot testing, internal consistency checks, clear statistical reporting, and comparisons with indicators from the National Labor Observatory. Qualitative trustworthiness was maintained through triangulation, audit trails, intercoder agreement, and reflective team discussions. The validity of the mixed-methods approach was strengthened by clearly linking research questions, EMPOWER domains, data sources, and analysis methods and by demonstrating a critical realist focus on both observable patterns and underlying structures.

### **Ethical Issues**

Ethical approval for this study was granted by the academic and research oversight committee of a public higher education authority in Saudi Arabia (IRB Approval Number: IRB/25/18). The study was reviewed in accordance with international ethical standards, including the Declaration of Helsinki (World Medical Association, 2017). Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all the respondents before data collection. Confidentiality was ensured by anonymizing survey responses and focus group transcripts, securely storing data digitally, and restricting access to research materials. No

identifying information was included in the analytical datasets or reported in the findings.

### **Limitations**

This cross-sectional design records employment outcomes at a single point in time and does not track career progression. Using purposive and network-based sampling limits statistical generalizability and might underrepresent graduates with weaker institutional connections. Self-reported data could introduce response bias, but triangulating with employer data and national labor indicators helps strengthen the interpretation.

### **RESULTS**

This section presents findings from a quantitative survey of 200 literature and linguistics graduates, an employer survey of 50 respondents, and qualitative focus group data ( $n = 40$ ). The results are organized according to RQ1–RQ3. Quantitative and qualitative strands are presented separately, followed by integrated reporting. National labor indicators are included for contextual reference only.

#### **Employment Outcomes and Predictors (RQ1)**

At the time of data collection, 37% of graduates reported being employed in any capacity. Among those employed, 26% reported full-time employment, and 28% reported part-time or freelance work. A total of 22% reported enrollment in further studies. The mean job search duration was 285 days. Reported starting salaries were approximately 1,100 Saudi riyals below the national bachelor's graduate benchmark reported by the National Labor Observatory.

Binary logistic regression was conducted to examine the associations between employment status and selected predictors. Internship participation was significantly associated with employment status,  $B = 0.65$ ,  $SE = 0.32$ ,  $Wald = 4.17$ ,  $p = .040$ ,  $OR = 1.92$ , 95% CI [1.03, 3.58]. Willingness to relocate was also significantly associated with employment status,  $B = 0.76$ ,  $SE = 0.33$ ,  $Wald = 5.28$ ,  $p = .020$ ,  $OR = 2.14$ , 95% CI [1.12, 4.08]. Region of residence and faculty mentorship were not statistically significant predictors.

Model fit statistics indicated Nagelkerke  $R^2 = .28$ . The Hosmer–Lemeshow test was nonsignificant,  $\chi^2(8) = 6.31$ ,  $p = .61$ . The overall classification accuracy was 72%.

**Table 1. Binary Logistic Regression Predicting Employment Status (n = 200)**

Predictor	B	SE	Wald	p	OR	95% CI
Internship participation	0.65	0.32	4.17	.040	1.92	1.03–3.58
Willingness to relocate	0.76	0.33	5.28	.020	2.14	1.12–4.08
Region of residence	0.21	0.29	0.52	.470	1.23	0.70–2.18
Faculty mentorship	0.18	0.27	0.44	.510	1.20	0.71–2.05
Constant	–0.89	0.41	4.72	.030	0.41	—

*Note.* B = unstandardized regression coefficient; SE = standard error; Wald = Wald chi-square statistic; p = significance value; OR = odds ratio; 95% CI = 95% confidence interval. Employment status was coded as 1 = employed and 0 = not employed. Odds ratios greater than 1 indicate an increased likelihood of employment.

### Mobility Willingness and Reported Barriers (RQ2)

Thirty-one percent of graduates reported a willingness to relocate domestically, and 18% reported a willingness to work abroad. Previous sector mobility was reported by 39.5% of the respondents, and 34.5% reported prior regional relocation. Graduates ranked perceived barriers to employment and mobility. The lowest mean rank (indicating higher perceived importance) was a lack of suitable opportunities (M = 2.72). Other barriers included limited experience (M = 3.10), low employer awareness (M = 3.06), geographic constraints (M = 3.06), and limited job search skills (M = 3.06).

Qualitative analysis produced themes corresponding to these ranked barriers. Themes included limited access to work-integrated learning, restricted engagement with career services, family-related relocation constraints, housing cost concerns, and perceived misalignment of skills. Intercoder agreement exceeded  $\kappa = .80$  for the reliability subsample.

**Table 2. Joint Display of Ranked Quantitative Barriers and Corresponding Qualitative Themes**

Quantitative Barrier	Mean Rank	Corresponding Qualitative Themes
Lack of suitable opportunities	2.72	Scarcity of discipline-relevant roles; concentration in urban centers
Limited experience	3.10	Limited access to discipline-specific internships
Limited employer awareness	3.06	Perceived underrecognition of transferable language skills
Geographic constraints	3.06	Family responsibilities; housing costs; social obligations
Limited job search skills	3.06	Limited institutional guidance on CV writing and interview preparation

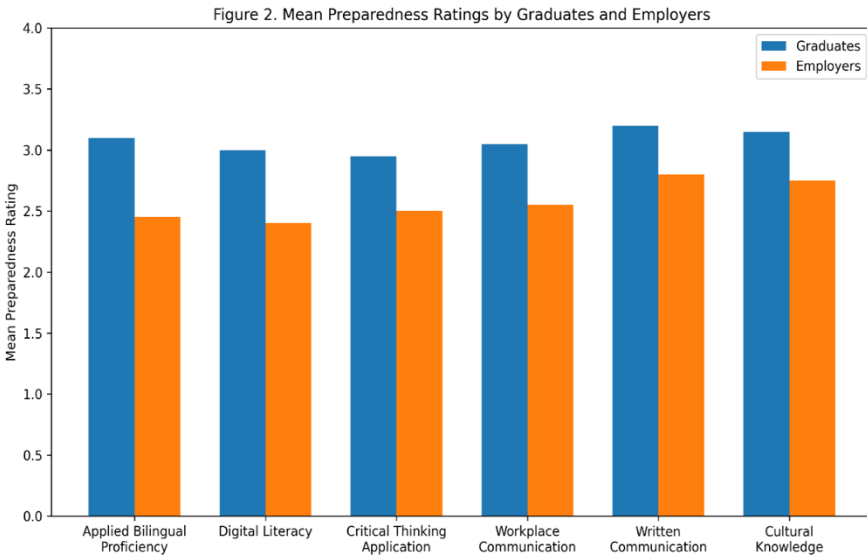
*Note.* Lower mean ranks indicate greater perceived importance.

### **Employer and Graduate Preparedness Ratings (RQ3)**

Graduates reported a mean preparedness rating of  $M = 3.05$  ( $SD = 1.01$ ). Employees reported a lower mean preparedness rating ( $M = 2.46$ ,  $SD = 0.92$ ). An independent samples t test indicated a statistically significant difference between groups,  $t(248) = 2.87$ ,  $p = .005$ , Cohen's  $d = 0.62$ .

Across skill domains, employers reported lower ratings than graduates did in terms of applied bilingual proficiency, digital literacy, the application of critical thinking, and workplace communication. Written communication and cultural knowledge received comparatively higher mean ratings from both groups. A comparative bar chart (Figure 2) displays the mean preparedness ratings reported by graduates and employers across the measured skill domains.

**Figure 2. Mean Preparedness Ratings by Graduates and Employers**



### **Integrated Reporting of Quantitative and Qualitative Findings**

The quantitative findings revealed that internship participation and willingness to relocate were statistically significant predictors of employment status. The qualitative findings revealed structural constraints affecting access to internships and relocation decisions. Ranked survey barriers corresponded with thematic patterns of limited discipline-specific opportunities, geographic concentration, and variability in institutional support.

Integration was conducted through joint display alignment and narrative comparisons of statistical patterns and thematic categories.

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## DISCUSSION

This study examined employability and mobility among Saudi literature and linguistics graduates by integrating national labor indicators with perspectives from graduates and employers. Three principal findings emerge. First, employment rates, transition duration, and wage patterns indicate that Literature and Linguistics graduates experience slower, less favorable early-career outcomes than those in the national average and in applied or STEM-related fields do. Second, internship participation and willingness to relocate are positively associated with employment status, highlighting the structural importance of mobility in a regionally concentrated labor market. Third, employers rated graduate preparedness significantly lower than graduates did, particularly in terms of digital literacy, applied bilingual proficiency, and workplace readiness.

These findings align with prior research demonstrating that employability is shaped not only by individual competencies but also by institutional alignment and labor market structure (Tomlinson & Holmes, 2017; Eimer & Bohndick, 2023). They also resonate with recent scholarship in the *Journal of International Students*, which emphasizes the roles of institutional strategies, transition pathways, and opportunity structures in shaping graduate employability outcomes (Xu et al., 2025; Jolly et al., 2025). Consistent with international evidence, internship participation appears to increase employment prospects when placements are discipline relevant and aligned with employer demand (Mseleku, 2024; Alzahrani et al., 2024). However, the present findings extend this literature by demonstrating that access to such opportunities is uneven and mediated by geographic concentration and sectoral distribution. In a labor market where private-sector expansion is clustered in metropolitan regions, mobility becomes a structural determinant rather than a peripheral consideration.

The association between willingness to relocate and employment status reinforces prior research linking geographic mobility to improved job match quality and wage outcomes (Venhorst & Cörvers, 2018; Drejer et al., 2021). However, only a minority of graduates reported being willing to relocate domestically or internationally. The qualitative findings indicate that family responsibilities, housing costs, and sociocultural expectations constrain relocation decisions. These results support the findings of Global South scholarship, emphasizing that mobility is shaped by social norms and resource distribution rather than purely economic incentives (Tomlinson & Nghia, 2022). For humanities graduates whose degrees may be less internationally portable than technical fields are, these constraints may intensify employment disparities.

Gender differences in mobility further illustrate structural complexity. Female graduates reported a lower willingness to relocate despite representing a majority within the discipline. While this study did not directly measure motivational factors, the findings suggest that mobility-related constraints contribute to differential access to employment. This observation is consistent with regional research highlighting how caregiving expectations and social norms influence labor market participation and mobility patterns (Assaad & Arntz, 2005;

Li, 2025). Rather than reflecting deficiencies in human capital, the evidence points to contextual mobility conditions as important explanatory factors.

The discrepancy between employer evaluations and graduate self-assessments also warrants attention. Employers reported lower ratings in digital literacy, applied bilingual proficiency, and workplace readiness. This gap may reflect signaling mismatches or differences in how academic competencies are translated into workplace practice. Prior research indicates that employers prioritize applied competencies and demonstrable workplace readiness over theoretical knowledge (Alshareef & Yunusa-Kaltungo, 2024). The present findings extend this evidence to Literature and Linguistics graduates, suggesting that curriculum design and employer engagement should be more closely aligned. The divergence between graduate self-assessment and employer evaluation echoes the findings of Ryan and Barton (2020), who emphasize that reflective capacity is central to bridging academic preparation and workplace expectations.

Theoretically, the findings support multilevel approaches to employability that incorporate structural and contextual variables alongside individual skill development. While models such as the USEM emphasize subject knowledge, skills, and efficacy, the present results indicate that geographic mobility, sector concentration, and institutional mediation are equally consequential. By integrating these interacting domains, the EMPOWER framework offers a more context-sensitive lens. This study, therefore, contributes to employability scholarship by operationalizing mobility as an explanatory variable within a discipline specific, regionally concentrated labor market.

In practice, the findings suggest that Literature and Linguistics programs may strengthen employability by embedding structured, discipline-relevant internships into the curriculum and by integrating applied digital and bilingual competencies across coursework. Career services could provide targeted preparation in terms of job search strategies, employer signaling, and regional mobility planning. Institutional partnerships with sectors aligned with workforce transformation, including education, media, tourism, and cultural industries, may expand discipline-relevant employment pathways.

At the policy level, the results indicate that workforce diversification strategies should account for mobility constraints. Targeted mobility grants, housing support mechanisms, and remote or hybrid employment pathways may reduce geographic barriers. Gender-responsive policies that address safe housing, transport access, and constraints on family negotiation could improve employment opportunities for female graduates. Without structural support mechanisms, discipline-specific disparities may persist despite broader labor market reforms.

Several limitations should be acknowledged. The cross-sectional design captures employment status at a single point in time and does not account for longer-term career trajectories. Purposive sampling limits statistical generalizability, and reliance on self-reported data may introduce response bias. Although triangulation with employer data and national indicators strengthens interpretive validity, causal inferences should be made cautiously.

Future research may extend this work in several ways. First, comparative studies across multiple humanities disciplines could clarify whether mobility effects differ by field-specific labor market signaling. Second, research examining employer recruitment criteria and signaling mechanisms in greater depth may illuminate sources of preparedness discrepancies. Third, a focused investigation of gendered mobility mechanisms—including housing access, transport infrastructure, institutional support systems, and workplace flexibility—could provide more granular insight into structural employment differentials. Such research would further refine context-sensitive employability frameworks in regionally concentrated labor markets.

In summary, the findings demonstrate that employability among Literature and Linguistics graduates is shaped by the interactions among individual competencies, institutional mediation, employer expectations, and geographic mobility conditions. Addressing discipline-specific disparities requires coordinated strategies among higher education institutions, employers, and policymakers in contexts characterized by an uneven distribution of opportunities.

## CONCLUSION

In this study, employability and mobility among Saudi Literature and Linguistics graduates were examined using a mixed-methods design that integrated survey data from graduates, employer evaluations, qualitative focus groups, and national labor indicators. The findings demonstrate that early career outcomes are shaped by interactions among individual competencies, institutional support structures, employer expectations, and geographic mobility conditions within a regionally concentrated labor market. Employment rates, transition duration, and wage patterns reflect not only graduate preparedness but also the distribution of structural opportunities and sectoral alignment.

By combining discipline-specific analysis with stakeholder perspectives, this study contributes to employability scholarship by operationalizing mobility as a central explanatory factor rather than as a contextual background. The findings extend individual-centered models of employability by demonstrating how structural and sociocultural mobility constraints interact with skill development in shaping graduate transitions. In practice, the results inform curriculum alignment, the integration of applied skills, and institutional–employer collaboration strategies within humanities programs. At the policy level, the study underscores the importance of mobility-sensitive workforce initiatives in contexts characterized by regional concentration and gendered participation patterns.

Although situated in Saudi Arabia, the findings offer insights for comparable higher education systems in the Global South, where the distribution of opportunities and sociocultural norms influence labor market integration. Future research should further investigate the structural mechanisms underlying mobility-related employment disparities, particularly gendered

mobility constraints, to refine context-sensitive employability frameworks and inform targeted institutional and policy interventions.

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