



## A Study on E-rozgar Opportunities for Pakistani ESL Graduates in Web Content Writing

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### ABSTRACT

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The study falls in the area of Internet Linguistics and explores e-rozgar opportunities in Web content writing. Web content writing jobs can be done at home on the Internet. Against a background of the ever-rising rate of unemployment in the country, the paper tries to highlight new online job opportunities offered in the field of Web content writing. The study emphasizes the need to equip our educated youths with Web content writing skills so that they can earn living at home. In order to benefit from these online opportunities, we need to know what web content writing is and how it is different from other forms of writing. The study explains not only these aspects but also other important aspects of Web content writing such as Search Engine Optimization (SEO) and the influence of SEO on the writing preferences of Web content writers. As the study moves on, it emphasizes the important role linguistics and English teachers can play in imparting Web content writing skills to the unemployed graduates in the country. The teachers and course designers need to keep themselves abreast of the changes in the job market. It concludes by highlighting the importance of tailoring MA English / linguistics and M. Phil English / linguistics course contents to the existing freelancing job market trends.

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## 1. Introduction

Pakistan is rich in natural resources. It has mountains, deserts, green fields and warm waters of the Arabian Sea. But, these resources have not been effectively explored and channelized yet. Perhaps, this is why, the people of this land have been facing economic challenges since 1947. The unemployment rate in Pakistan in 2013, according to International Labour Organization (ILO), was 5.17. Sidiki (January 22, 2014) of the Express Tribune reports, 'The Global Employment Trends report issued by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) projected that Pakistan's unemployment rate was 5.17% in 2013. This high rate of unemployment, directly or indirectly, was linked with social problems such as juvenile crimes, violence caused by urban gangsters, drug addiction and low turnout of graduates for higher education.

The government of Pakistan, over the years, has taken steps to reduce unemployment in the country. Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP), Waseela-i-Haq, Waseela-e-Rozgar, Yellow Cab Schemes, Prime Minister's Youth Business Loan, Khudkafalat Rozgar Scheme (Khaiber Pakhtunkhwa) and Kamyab jawan program by PTI current government are some such programmes launched for the alleviation of poverty and reduction of unemployment in the country. In addition, the different political governments have focused on equipping youths with technical skills so that they may earn honourable living. Technical Education & Vocational Training Authority (TEVTA) and Skill Development Council (SDC) have been constituted to

develop and arrange demand-driven technical education and vocational programmes for the youths of Pakistan. But, there are still miles to go before the nation gets rid of this high rate of unemployment and the social problems caused by unemployment. The government alone can not meet the challenges. We have to make our own contributions. It is in this background of the need to contribute towards the solution of unemployment in the country that the researchers have made the current study. Before we come to the focus of the study, let us look at how the Internet has changed our world.

Communication is an integral aspect of life on the earth. Collective social life of humans necessitates communication. Therefore, communication appears to be as old as human existence itself. Human communication involves speech, writing and other non-verbal forms of communication which have some semiotic significance—sign language, body language, gestures, braille and the like. Of these forms of communication, writing appears to be a later development when compared with speech. Writing is a way of communication in which humans use symbols, signs and letters for interpersonal communication. The snippets and stretches of writing are called texts. Those who read the texts are called readers. For ages man has written for man. However, things changed with the advent of the Internet in the 1980s.

The Internet is an international network of regional networks of interconnected computers. Craig (2003) explains that 'the Internet is in fact a global network of computers that is split between clients and servers (p.6). The Internet contains huge amount of information. This information is available in the form of texts, images and graphics. The Internet seems to contain the hugest amount of text at one place in human world. This dynamic presence of language on the Internet has aroused the interests of linguists. Crystal (2011) argues;

*"Wherever we find language, we find linguistics. That is what linguists are for: to seek out, describe and analyze manifestations of language everywhere. So when we encounter the largest database of language the world has ever seen, we would expect to find linguists exploring it, to see what is going on. It has begun to happen. And a new field is emerging as a consequence: Internet linguistics' (p.1)".*

In order to study language on the Internet, researchers of linguistics need to work in collaboration with professionals of computer science and experts of Web technologies. The current study combines insights from Information Technology and linguistics and tries to study the impact of search engine optimization on the writing preferences of web content writers.

## **2. Web Technologies: the Internet as an Interactive Medium**

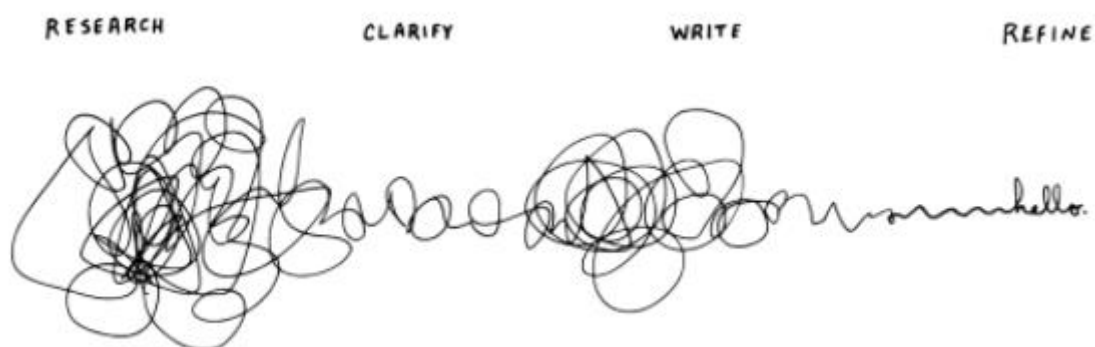
There are millions of websites on the Internet. The Internet is not a traditional, static medium, as a newspaper is. It has become now an interactive medium of sharing information. With the advent of web technology, the Internet has become an interactive medium of sharing information. Craig (2003) argues that 'unlike traditional forms of media such as newspapers and radio, the Internet allows users to interact with whatever they are looking for (p.8). He further explains that content on the websites can be changed every moment to update it with newer and latest situations, developments and requirements. Businesses can communicate with the customers on the basis of updated situations. Significant point in these ideas of Craig is that the content on the Web can be changed on a moment-by-moment basis. This dynamic nature of the Internet did not exist in the past. Therefore, owners of websites hire the services of Web content writers to maintain and update content on their websites.

Craig (2003) explains that the roles content writers in the development of websites are underestimated. A web content writer's job is to create the textual content of a website. There are people who work as writers and editors of the Web content. But writing Web content requires different skills. Craig (2003) further explains that working as web content writer on the Internet requires a different set of skills. One's command in traditional writing may not be sufficient for the creation of successful content. Some companies hire traditional writers. This is a mistake in web content writing. Writing and reading on the screen are different from reading and writing on the paper. These words of Craig, then, explain that a Web content writer has to face different challenges as compared with a traditional writer. While we normally read for

paper pages of the book, on the Internet, reads from Web pages. Reading the text on the Web pages may cause eye-strain and therefore, readers' eyes may not linger long on the Web pages.

Gay, Charlesworth, and Esen (2006) argue that on the Internet context, and mode of reading are different. Even with high-resolution monitors prolonged, reading on a computer screen can be painful. This is why readers rarely read a complete web page. They quickly scan the text and focus on important words. They leave out those words which hold no information for them. So, in this situation, web content writers need to add effective descriptive headers and sub-headers bullet points and shorter paragraphs in the text. In addition, hypertext links can be inserted in the text to guide the reader for further information. Lee (2014) explains that good content is clear, useful and friendly. It helps in achieving the set goals. Lee (2014) gives the following figure to illustrate how from confusion to refinement writing moves.

**Figure 1: the process of content writing (Lee, 2014)**



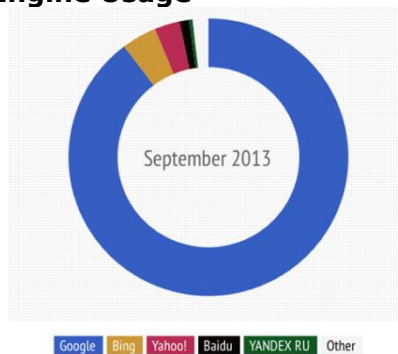
Stuart (2007) argues that the best thing is to keep content simple, short and easy. Miller (2012) explains that web content writers should write short paragraphs. Thus, Web content writers have to face different challenges. They have to take into account how long users stay on the page and what information they look for. Comprehensibility and legibility of the text are not the only aspects they have to keep in mind. These two aspects are important if your readers are humans only. In fact, the Internet contains millions of texts. We refer to these texts on the Internet as Web content. Web content texts are written for a broad range of purposes. They educate, inform and instruct the readers.

In addition, they are written to promote businesses. Political parties and social movements develop their own Web content to win greater number of supporters. The ultimate intended readers of the Web content are humans but when Web content writers write web content, they have in their minds not only humans as the intended readers of their texts but also machines—search engines. How do the workings of search engines influence the writers of Web content? What strategies do they adopt to make their content search-friendly on the Internet? These are the questions that we need to answer to study this unprecedented phenomenon of texts of human writing being written for machines.

### **3. Search Engine Optimization (SEO)**

Search engines are not heavy machines made of steel or some metal. They are software systems which are used to collect relevant information. Stand-alone computers and cell phones have their own search engines but here we are concerned with the Internet search engines or web search engines. We are familiar with search engines on the Internet because most of us use them every day when we want to arrive at the right available information. Google, Yahoo!, Bing, Baidu, YANDEX RU, Duck Duck Go and Gigablast are some of the well-known web search engines. Of all these web search engines, Google has the greatest worldwide usage, as the figure 2 shows.

**Figure 2: Worldwide Search Engine Usage**



Source: (World Wide Search Engine Usage) Retrieved December 6, 2013, from <http://www.clicky.co.uk/2013/09/search-engine-usage-september-2013/>

In order to understand the importance of web content writing in SEO, we have to understand how search engines work. Rognerud (2011) explains that a search engine is defined as an information retrieval system (p.19). Thus, a web search engine retrieves the relevant information for us from the World Wide Web. The term 'Search Engine Optimization' is a combination of two words: 'search engine' and optimization. Optimization is the process of making something effective and functional. Olsen, Viglas, and Zvedeniouk (2010) argue that 'Search Engine Optimization (SEO) is a fast-growing industry that deals with optimizing the ranking of web pages in search engine results' (p. 87). Search Engine Optimization includes a number of strategies. The figure 3 shows important strategies employed in SEO.

**Figure 3: SEO Strategies**



Source: Retrieved December 5, 2013, from <http://www.helpalocalbusiness.com/services/local-search-engine-optimization/>

Figure 3 shows that SEO begins with a need analysis which helps SEO experts know the requirements of their clients. The second step is website analysis. Keyword research is the third step. Elmansy and Majure (2013) explain that keywords are the most important part of SEO. Most SEO procedures require that you choose the keywords that best represent your website's function and to enhance your website either by optimizing the website content files for precise keywords, or by sending online users' traffic and links to your website using these keywords. Therefore, it is important that as a content writer working on the Internet you understand how to select website keywords and how to optimize them. Your website can focus on a number of particular keywords, and each page in your website should be optimized for a specific keyword to help the search engine display this page when users type this keyword in their search queries. These ideas of Elmansy and Majure (2013) underline the importance of keywords and understanding working of search engines and the behavior of online users' traffic.

The third step, keyword research, then, is based on the knowledge gained in the first two steps. Clay and Esparza (2011) argue that a keyword in SEO is 'a specific word or phrase

a search engine looks for in its index (the list of web sites it looks at during a search), based on what the user typed as the search query. For example, [cars] could be a keyword for a website that deals with restoring classic cars' (p.85). Thus, in keyword research web content writers try to know which keywords are required for the optimization of the web pages of a given site. Ledford (2009) explains that there are website applications like 'Google Analytics' which track visitors' keywords and show us reports about keyword-based traffic. Once we know the right keywords that can optimize a given web page, we need to determine the density of the keywords and how those words should be placed on the page.

#### 4. Density and Position of Keywords

Keywords are important for SEO. Clay and Esparza (2011) argue that 'the mantra of search engines should be "keywords, keywords, keywords" (p.85). These words seem to forcefully emphasise the importance of keywords in SEO. If search engines simply rank pages on the basis of the presence of keywords, then a logical course of action should be to have higher density of keywords on the web page. But, search engines seem to take other aspects into account. Talking about density of keywords on a given web page, Dunford (2008) explains:

Keyword density is the ratio of a keyword or key phrase on a page in relation to all other keywords on that page. If a particular keyword is repeatedly used on a webpage, then that keyword will have a higher density compared to all the other words that appear on the page. For example, if you have a 500 word page and your specific keyword is repeated 50 times, then the keyword density of that page would be 10% for the specific keyword. A good rule of thumb is to consider when optimizing a page is that search engines typically regard a web page with a 6 to 8% keyword density a high quality page for that keyword or key phrase. If the keyword density is over that amount, then search engines may penalize your web page or site for keyword spamming' (P.68).

There are situations where density of words is not defined by the advertisers of content writing job ads. The density of words is left to the discretion of the content writer. Web content writers may find themselves in trouble, if the advertiser insists of higher density of keywords. Repeating keywords may make the text stylistically weak. As far as the position of keywords is concerned, Sweeney (2004) explains that 'some search engines rank sites by how early the keyword appears on the site. The earlier a keyword is mentioned on your site, the higher your site may be positioned in search results' (p.102). At times, the advertisers of content writing jobs themselves give out clear instructions to content writers regarding the keywords. They specify the keywords which content writers have to naturally incorporate in the text of the required content, as the following job ad on www. Odesk.com shows in figure 4.

**Figure 4: A Web Content Writing Job Ad**

### Basic Website Content

Fixed Price Project - Est. Budget \$80.00 - Posted 25 minutes ago

#### Job Description

Hello there,  
I Would like Unique content for the following pages for the cake creation website;

- 1) Cake Classes (Learn how to make cakes from the professionals)
- 2) Custom Cakes
- 3) Occasions -> (cakes for any occasions- Weddings, Birthdays, Parties)
- 4) Cookies

Please provide unique content for these pages and please include keywords, Toronto, Pickering Bay.

Source: [https://www.odesk.com/jobs/Basic-Website-Content\\_~0188177b28444abf62?search\\_result=1](https://www.odesk.com/jobs/Basic-Website-Content_~0188177b28444abf62?search_result=1)

In the job ad given above, we see that the advertiser has mentioned the keywords that the selected content writer will have to incorporate in the text of the content. The keywords given are 'Toronto', 'Pickering' and 'By the Bay'. The advertiser is a cake creating company, perhaps, operating in Canada. In order to attract online buyers of cakes in Canada, they want

the content writers to use these words repeatedly in the text so that their website gets better ranking for searches that are made on the given keywords.

Thus, successful Web content writing partly depends on how much you know about the workings of the Web search engines and how much a content writer knows about the most searched words which are related to the content being developed. In this way, web content writers not only write for humans but for machines (software systems) called web search engines as well. So, we can say that machines are now the intended readers or target audience of the texts written by humans on the Internet. If we impart the practical knowledge of SEO along with good English writing skills to our graduates in Pakistan, they need to waste precious years of their youth in pursuit of comfortable job because this unprecedented form of writing is in great demand in the online freelancing market.

## **5. E-freelancing Market and Pakistani Graduates**

E-freelancing is a growing market in the world. Skilled professionals in Asian countries are turning to this huge market to monetize their potential and skills. Hamid (July 5, 2014) talks about unemployment in western Asia and the job opportunities the e-freelancing market offers them. The news reporter explains, 'Now, some of those unemployed are turning to the world of freelance to put their skills and university education to use – and they are finding that the easiest way to secure some of this work is online. The global e-freelancing market was estimated to be worth US\$1.5 billion last year' (para1). Hamid's words show how extensive and huge is the online freelancing market. South Asians are benefiting from this e-freelancing market. While freelancers may not have permanent jobs, they may have handsomer income than the income of permanent employees. Schwartz and Locander (2010) explain that 'freelancing is to work for yourself without being on staff or salaried with a specific company' (p.22). Thus, as a freelancer, you are not bound to work for a specific company. You can work for multiple companies. There is no age-limit in freelancing market. It is an open market where clients from developed countries hire professionals from the developing countries of the world. The clients get their work done by Asians and Africans on cheap rates and Asian freelancers earn dollars from the comfortable environment of their homes.

When we survey the world of online freelancing, we see that Indians, Filipinos and Bangladeshis are leading the freelancing market. A good number of Pakistanis are also carrying out these desktop jobs from their homes. E-freelancing market includes a large variety of jobs which can be done at home. Web development, web design, computer programming, graphic design, journalism, proofreading, publishing, copy editing, translating, copywriting and Web content writing are some of such jobs. Gandia (2012) conducted a survey among '1,491 freelancers working in more than 50 different fields and professions'. He explains, 'We asked several questions to determine the survey participants 'makeup, and we began by asking participants about their profession. Designers comprised the biggest professional category (20%), followed by writers (18%), editors/ copyeditors (11%), copywriters (10%), translators (8%) and web developers (5%)(p.7)'. His findings show that writers, editors, copy writers and translators make 47% of all online freelancers. These online jobs are related to language and linguistics.

When we teach linguistics and English to our students, we should keep in mind the practical application of the subjects taught in the job market. If the subjects we teach in the university have market value, then our graduates may not go through the ordeals of unemployment. For instance, if we introduce Web content writing as a 100-marks subject in M.Phil. and MA English / linguistics classes, the students may immediately benefit from the subject. They may start earning dollars from their very hostel rooms, since the Internet is available these days in the university hostels in Pakistan. If we cannot introduce 100-marks subject in our MA English / linguistics and M.Phil. English / linguistics classes, we may design short courses which students can attend in summer vacation. Since the government cannot give permanent jobs to all educated people of the country, we have to provide our graduates lucrative alternatives.

Another trend reported by Gandia (2012) study is that women constitute the largest group of freelancers. This may be happy news to working mothers who want to be good mothers and good professionals. They can do these virtual jobs from their homes. For

instance, Tara Orchard is a working woman who is virtual consultant these days. In an interview with Hussain (June 25, 2015) she explained that she ran her office from her home. Most of the work she performed was virtual business offering her to work in flexible hours. She can easily adjust strike a balance between her work and family engagements.

Thus, her flexible online job offers him freedom to give time to her family. In addition, these home jobs may dovetail with the cultural and social norms of Pakistan with regard to working women. Thus, online job market offers great opportunities for freelancers and writers who are good at English. People prefer online jobs because online jobs offer flexible working hours. There is need to pay attention to this segment of international labor market which is a few clicks away. But, e-freelancing market does not contain only rosy pictures. There are swindlers as well who try to ambush online job hunters.

While thousands of independent freelancers in South Asia are benefiting from these lucrative jobs in open market of the online world, there are scammers who are exploiting the unemployed Asian youths. Humayon (Aug 8, 2013) of Times of India warns, '*Naive young people, who are on the lookout for jobs, are increasingly falling prey to online scammers, who promise quick money and lucrative employment*' (para 1). *Scammers are active not only in India but in Pakistan and other Asian countries as well. Talking about scammers in Pakistan*, Rizvi (November 21, 2013) of The News reports, '*A notorious network of fraudulent groups has been taking advantage of the high unemployment numbers in the country by swindling people desperately searching for employment in the country*' (para 1). There are cyber-crime courts in Pakistan which deal with such affairs. However, there are companies and websites which offer guaranteed reward of the work.

Pakistan needs to take freelancing seriously. The young population of the country is educated having degrees in their hands. They have fewer job opportunities especially in small cities. They leave their homes to get jobs in Lahore and Karachi. In this context, the global world of freelancing offers them great opportunities of finding work online. The government in Pakistan needs to facilitate them grab better opportunities as freelancers. In freelancing and online business, as already explained, content creation occupies a unique niche. (Ouellette, January 7, 2022) observes that '*72% of online marketers describe content creation as their most effective SEO tactic*' (para. 2). Thus, it implies that content creation is vital for professional existence and corporate growth on the Internet. Kilian (2015) argues that creating, designing and developing an effective website has much more to do with engaging text for the target people. This dimension offers unique opportunities to students studying at departments of English language in Pakistan. With better writing and communicative skills they can make a difference in the national income and their own financial position.

## **6. Conclusion**

In this study we have tried to examine how the workings of web search engines influence the writing preferences of web content writers. In order to bring web pages on better ranking, web content writers have to interpolate certain keywords in the web content they develop and manage. We have looked at how the position and density of keywords is determined by the functions of Web search engines. There is a need to further explore the phenomenon. The purpose of this study was to acquaint the readers with the available e-rozgar opportunities in Web content writing. As researchers of linguistics, we need to draw our students' attention to the huge e-freelancing market which offers great opportunities to people with good linguistic skills.

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