

**THE IMPACT OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE COMPETENCE ON  
FUTURE ENGINEERS' CAREER DEVELOPMENT / L'IMPACT  
DE LA COMPETENCE LINGUISTIQUE EN ANGLAIS SUR LE  
DEVELOPEMENT DE LA CARRIERE DES FUTURS  
INGENIEURS<sup>1</sup>**

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**Abstract:** *The article aims at emphasising the needs of undergraduates in the engineering domains to enhance their language competence in order to access rewarding future jobs. Moreover, it seeks to assess the English language proficiency of undergraduate students in order to improve their ability to utilise language more effectively in formal and informal situations. Furthermore, it investigates the English requirements of first-year undergraduates, with a specific focus on English courses that equip students for prosperous professional paths and personal growth.*

**Key words:** *undergraduate students, English language competence, skills, employability, language needs.*

### **1. Introduction**

The foreign language course should contribute to specialised instruction, focusing on hand-on content and competences since the level of proficiency in English may be a key component that determines the employability of future engineers. Moreover, evaluating language proficiency is a crucial aspect of teaching the English language at the university level of study. In Romania, English teachers adhere to the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) to assess students' proficiency levels in the four main language skills. The language skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing may be further categorised into receptive skills (listening and reading) and productive skills (speaking and writing), or alternatively referred to as oral skills and written skills. Listening and reading involve comprehending spoken or written language, whilst writing and speaking involve generating speech, initiating and sustaining verbal exchanges, and creating documents or texts that effectively communicate ideas in an organised manner. Language activity refers to the measurable application of language skills in tasks involving speaking, writing, reading, or listening, whether in real-world or classroom settings. Teachers can provide significant formative feedback to their students by watching such activities, which subsequently facilitates learning (University of Cambridge, 2011: 8). The CEFR outlines the action-oriented approach framework for language learning, which is employed to enhance and develop communicative language abilities. Language use encompasses the activities carried out by socially engaged individuals to acquire both general and specific language skills. In addition, by engaging in language activities, individuals have the ability to create and comprehend texts pertaining to a wide range of subjects from different areas of study or work. Thus, by the monitoring of these actions, the enhancement or alteration of the competencies can be accomplished (*ib*:7).

In addition, in order to achieve effective communication, undergraduates need to master the four fundamental communication skills through the use of functional and interactional skills (Acomi *et al.*, 2021: 77). Furthermore, distinct goals and purposes are formulated for every language instruction setting. However, the CEFR highlights that language contexts might be similar in nature (University of Cambridge, 2011: 12).

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Such an explicit proficiency framework offers a structure for learning that can assist learners in orienting themselves and establishing objectives. It is an essential prerequisite that is valuable for customising learning to meet the individual needs of each student, as there exists an ideal level at which each learner should be operating. It enables instruction to prioritise the strengths and weaknesses that either assist or impede learners. It promotes a collective comprehension of proficiency levels, making it easier to establish attainable learning objectives for a group, and connecting achievements to the learners' ability to effectively carry out certain tasks or pursue higher education using the language (University of Cambridge, 2011: p.13). Learners, as social agents, can actively participate in the learning process by using descriptors as a form of communication. Furthermore, it involves acknowledging the communal aspect of acquiring and utilising language, as well as the interplay between societal influences and personal development during the learning process. Consequently, learners should make considerable use of the target language in the classroom. Learners can employ their individual linguistic assets, particularly their native language and cultural background. It is important to motivate students to recognise the similarities and distinctions that exist between languages and civilizations (Council of Europe, 2020: 27). Nevertheless, the CEFR replaces the conventional framework of the four abilities by incorporating communicative language activities and methods. This is because it is not sufficient to accurately represent how a language is used in real-life situations, when speakers collaborate to create meaning together. Activities are intentionally created to serve as means of communication, encompassing reception, production, interaction, and mediation (*ib.*: 30). Moreover, learners actively engage in the learning process and self-learning by generating and receiving messages that involve them as active participants in authentic learning situations.

Many sectors necessitate individuals with a proficient command of the English language such as science, information technology, banking, finance, and all technical sectors. Approximately 85% of international organisations employ English as one of their working languages and over eighty percent of academic journals are composed in English (Cambridgenglish.org, 2024). Additionally, in countries where English is not an official language, half of employers assert that individuals who possess a high level of language competences and possess a strong command of the language will experience career advantages. Additionally, it asserts that employers regard reading as the most critical language talent in twelve industries, followed by speaking in eight industries (*id.*). The demand for oral communication skills is equivalent to the demand for written communication skills, as these businesses necessitate English communication in their day-to-day business operations (Ojanperä, 2014). Most employers may require fluency in both written and spoken English from their employees, but the degree and type of the competence depend on the role. The predominant employment opportunities that necessitated proficiency in English are primarily in the field of technology, encompassing roles such as hardware engineers/technicians, network managers, software developers, systems administrators, programmers, technology consultants, business intelligence specialists, and mobile developers.

## **2. Purpose of the study**

Enhancing the level of English language among undergraduates in the fields of study of Information Technology, Applied Electronics, and Networks and Software in Telecommunications is a matter of concern for English language teachers. It may be beneficial to determine undergraduates' needs and evaluate companies' requirements for English language proficiency of future employees. The principal objective will be that of analysing undergraduates' language competence in order to educating and

enhancing their cross-functional skills. The study is based on the examination of the English language needs of first year undergraduates attending courses in technical domains at university level. English courses can empower students to gain proficiency in the English language, enabling them to achieve successful careers and enhance personal development. This can result in the development of both language skills that are necessary to successfully complete academic examinations and later, in the professional environment. The content, methods, and strategies of teaching English to engineers are sensitive and demanding. The objective of the FL course is to aid students in acquiring and improving their overall and specialised understanding of the English language.

### **3. Impact of the topic**

One important idea is that English is the dominant global language for communication in today's interconnected digital world. English language proficiency is crucial for both organisations to obtain a competitive edge in the global market and for individuals to enhance their career development opportunities. Currently, there are numerous tools available that can assist in obtaining general data of a country's proficiency in the English language. For example, the World English Proficiency index may provide data regarding the proficiency of English language competences across individuals in different nations. The findings are derived from data obtained through online English tests that are freely accessible. The index is an internet-based questionnaire, utilising data from 1.7 million individuals who took the test, its latest edition being published in November 2023. The EF English Proficiency Index ranks countries based on their English proficiency, indicating a global deficit model. Countries with high rankings often see a decline in English usage due to reduced use in scientific research, academic instruction, and international companies.

Moreover, the QS Global Employer Survey revealed that a significant majority of employers in various non-native English speaking countries believe English language skills to be of utmost importance, with a percentage exceeding 95% (Clement and Murugavel, 2018: 40). Nevertheless, recruiters do not place a great importance on the use of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. Frequently, despite the candidate possessing the necessary English proficiency as desired by the business, they often struggle to accurately evaluate their language skills. Therefore, the curriculum vitae that is sent by the recruiter does not accurately represent the candidate's actual proficiency in understanding, reading, and writing in the foreign language (Acomi *et al.*, *op.cit.*: 39). This may result in employers having a misunderstanding of the candidate's real linguistic proficiency. Nevertheless, recruiters would be pleased to conduct interviews and employ individuals who possess proficiency in both English communication and job-related abilities. Recruiters often identify a significant deficiency in candidates for various jobs, which is their inadequate oral and written communication abilities (*id.*). Hence, the initial communication to invite a potential employee for an interview is conducted in English. It enables the recruiter to condense the pool of candidates. Insufficient proficiency in English poses a disadvantage for candidates with technical expertise. Interviewers may have a dilemma when they come across candidates who possess technical proficiency, but lack effective English communication skills. They may employ such applicants, depending on their degree of topic expertise, but they will ensure that they will receive the necessary training and development (*id.*).

Moreover, employers may express their appreciation for employees who possess academic or professional experience that enhance their English language proficiency. This includes opportunities such as scholarships abroad, internships in foreign companies, volunteering, or any form of interaction with native English speakers that

aids in the performance of job responsibilities. Employees in corporate jobs must regularly participate in everyday business contacts and communicate with executives from various worldwide locations. Therefore, English is the prevailing language and having a high level of competence in English has become an essential ability for securing job. Engaging in activities such as writing emails, online chat, and business presentations requires language skills that are above average in order to enable a clear and unambiguous transmission of information among all participants. Lack of sufficient English language skills hinders the effectiveness of communication, resulting in misunderstandings, dissatisfaction and challenges among personnel (Ojanperä, 2014). Furthermore, speaking English as a second language in the workplace may require what Celce-Murcia (2007: 40) refers to as *interactional competence*, which includes knowing how to carry out specific speech acts involving interpersonal interactions, being able to switch roles during a conversation, and knowing when to use silence, body language, and space between speakers. A 2000 study on language needs in business surveyed European multinational companies (Didiot-Cook, Gauthier and Scheirlinckx, 2000). This language requirements study was done to synchronise the usage of foreign languages in the workplace with the training of future managers in the CEMS (Community of European Management Schools) programme. According to the study, companies anticipate a minimum requirement of advanced English proficiency, specifically emphasising the importance of written English competence. Oral proficiency is highly esteemed, particularly due to the growing use of written English in email correspondence, papers, and academic study. Moreover, proficiency in a second foreign language is either mandatory or highly advantageous, as it demonstrates a person's open-mindedness. Recruiters prioritise self-confidence as a decisive aspect, considering basic communication skills and adequate experience to be essential. Email is ubiquitous, and formal emails adhere to rigorous norms. Proficiency in oral communication, specifically in delivering presentations, is essential for effective participation in meetings, negotiations, and phone discussions. The proliferation of emerging technologies has heightened the demand for enhanced communication abilities. The study concluded that advanced and near-native English proficiency in a business context entails decision-making, problem-solving, persuasion, complaint handling, negotiation, crisis management, conflict resolution, recommendation-making, and strategy implementation. Although it has been 20 years since this survey was conducted and there have been significant changes in the corporate world, we feel that the demand for these abilities has actually increased. This is due to the complexity and wide range of business contacts that exist today.

Furthermore, from employers' viewpoint, speaking abilities were ranked highest among respondents (86.8%) in a study on the value of language proficiency in the workplace (Ojanperä, 2014.). However, according to Cambridge English Assessment, (2024), employers prioritise reading as the most crucial skill due to its frequent usage in foreign publications. Subsequently, there was a transition to verbal communication within sectors such as customer service. For example, nowadays, companies in Romania seek proficiency in English for more than one-third of their employment offers (Hipo, 2024). The Romanian candidates for these positions often possess a moderate to high proficiency in the English language. Hence, in order to enhance their prospects of securing employment and targeting lucrative job opportunities, employers advise acquiring a proficient command of the English language, beyond the average level, and supplementing it with technical English skills (Acomi *et al.*, *op.cit.*: p.38).

It is evident that a basic conversational competency in general English (B1 level) may be insufficient in most sectors. Whilst fluency in everyday English is still vital, students will need to acquire higher levels of language competency as they progress through their degree programmes (B2-C1). Moreover, it is desirable that they may possess the

ability to utilise various linguistic styles. For welcomes, questions, apologies, orders, gratitude, requests for permission and opinions, proposals, storytelling, agreements, disagreements, and so forth, one style should be more informal. The other style, which is more formal, should be used for predicting, characterising, summing, disputing, categorising, and other purposes.

#### **4. Research Methodology**

Language communicative competence refers to an individual's capacity to fulfil the demands of a specific domain such as engaging with others, comprehending spoken assignments, sharing and exchanging information and ideas in meetings and conversations, providing coherent explanations, logical thinking, requesting and conveying oral instructions. Moreover, the primary factors that significantly impact the quality of an employee's work in terms of English writing skills include the capacity to express ideas effectively in written form, the use of concise sentences, the ability to write reports (including the corresponding emails for their distribution), the clear communication of ideas (particularly in technical or subject-specific contexts), the compilation of documents, and the composition of emails. Additionally, the principle of transferable/ cross-functional skills concept emphasises the ability of various scientific disciplines to interact and complement each other. It promotes comprehensive professional development and encourages students to pursue a wide range of specialised fields of study. Furthermore, the shift in education towards the attainment of transdisciplinary goals necessitates the establishment of structural frameworks for the educational process that are rooted in knowledge, comprehension, and the practical application of acquired knowledge and skills, through proficient analysis, synthesis, and assessment.

##### **4.1. Participants**

The research was carried out in June 2024 at the National University of Science and Technology Politehnica of Bucharest - Pitesti University Centre. The subjects were undergraduates in the first year of study, full-time programmes. of Information Technology (IT), Applied Electronics (AE), and Networks and Software in Telecommunications (NST) These first year students, irrespective of their engineering specialization, had 28 h of English seminar and 22 h of self-study of English in each semester. The English course was tailored according to the annual educational plan and focused on activities meant to assist students enhance their reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills. Their average proficiency level can be described as upper-intermediate and intermediate in their first year of language.

##### **4.2. Research aims**

The questions that this study may answer focus on several principal topics and subtopics as follows:

- a. Challenges faced when using English:
  - awareness of language level
  - importance of enhancing English skills during University studies
  - difficult language issues to address
- b. Essential needs of English proficiency for future job and career development:
  - good command of English language to get better paid jobs
  - self-confidence in using English
  - the most relevant language skill for future career
- c. Enhancement of language skills
  - language competence acquired during the first year of study at the university
  - language self-study and practise

- goals for self-motivation in language learning

The primary objective of the study is to discover specific content and strategies that can be used to facilitate the smooth integration of students into the labour market after they graduate from university. This includes examining language skills as a crucial tool in technical, technological, and science sectors. The questions were designed to evaluate the students' learning experience, the approaches employed in English language learning, and students' level of confidence in enhancing language skills for interviews and group discussions. The participants came from a variety of cultural backgrounds and geographical areas in Romania, especially the southern regions. An average of fifteen minutes was spent by the participants to reply to the questions.

#### 4.3. Procedure

The research data were collected by the questionnaire-based survey method, and the statistical processing was performed using Google forms and Word charts. To achieve the purpose of the research, a questionnaire with 33 questions was constructed and surveyed the perceptions of a number of 69 first year undergraduates of Information Technology (IT), Applied Electronics (AE), and Networks and Software in Telecommunications (NST) specialities regarding their language needs for general and future workplace – related English language.

#### 4.4. Research Data analysis

The data analysis provided concentrates on the EFL context. The data illustrates the most commonly selected responses by the participants and the corresponding proportion of students who opted for each choice. All data will be presented and discussed in accordance with the criteria of the research tool. The responses of the IT, AE, and NST first-year undergraduates will be compared in the qualitative analysis that follows.

#### 5. Findings and Discussion

The results were centralised, analysed, and interpreted using a three-dimensional perspective based on the tree principal topics surveyed.

##### 5.1. Challenges faced when using English

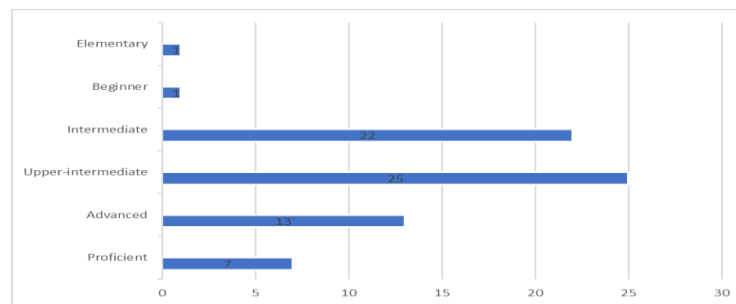


Fig.1 The clustered bar presents students' self-assessment of language proficiency

The students were required to self-assess their level of English proficiency, most of them being upper-intermediate (25 participants) and intermediate (22 participants). The majority (42%), commenced learning English in primary school, followed by nursery/kindergarten (26.1%), secondary school (23.1%), and university (first year) (23.1%). Moreover, 26.1% of the participants passed successfully one of Cambridge Examination Language Tests. Additionally, students admitted that they were

concentrating on improving their language skills, and recognised the difficulties they may have when using the language in different situations.

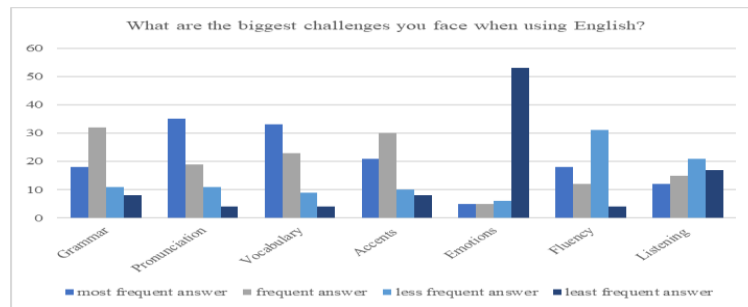


Fig.2 Chart illustrating students' challenges whilst speaking general English, in formal and informal situations.

The most frequent response from students indicates that pronunciation is the primary difficulty they encounter when speaking English in both formal and informal interactions. Answers focus on the pronunciation / mispronunciation of different / certain words, and not understanding non-native speakers' pronunciation. Frequently mentioned were the abilities to comprehend different dialects, to speak without a prominent native accent, not having a native-sounding accent, not understanding regional dialects spoken by native English speakers, the accent hindering the ability to speak English fluently etc. This means that future engineers should possess the ability to comprehend various English dialects and accents in order to effectively connect with clients worldwide.

Moreover, failing to accurately utilise grammar rules is a frequent response i.e. employing verb tenses correctly, finding hard to use grammar structures, using correct grammar in fluent speech. Multiple responses regularly highlighted vocabulary challenges, including difficulties in recalling words or selecting appropriate terms in context, struggles in acquiring new vocabulary, and, at a more advanced level, the problem of not fully mastering word order. On the one hand, participants' low listening skills and natives' fluency may be challenging. However, a small number of participants acknowledged that their emotional well-being and self-confidence could generate difficulties when it comes to using English in spoken situations.

Therefore, teachers need to provide students with a reason to study and opportunities to apply what they have learned about language structure and functions to real-world scenarios such as the workplace, in order to make language learning engaging, spark interest in the subject, and increase language competence.

## 5.2. Essential needs of English proficiency for future job and career development

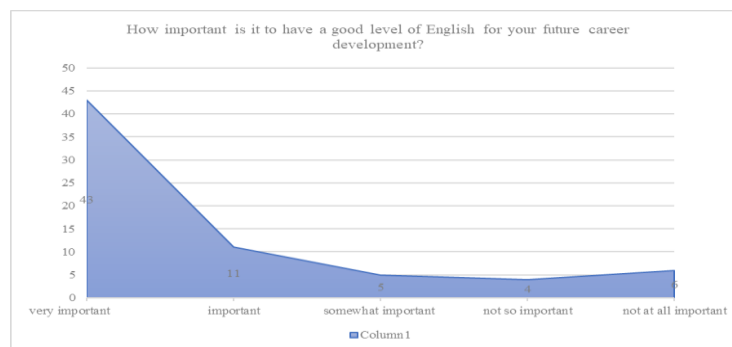


Fig. 3 The area chart highlights students' level of awareness regarding the importance of a good level of English in developing their future engineering career.

Based on the participants' opinions, 66.7% indicate that a prospective employer might demand English proficiency as one of the required abilities. Having a good command of the English language may be key for obtaining better paid jobs and access career advancement. To the question *Why is the English level important in developing your engineering career?* the majority of participants' responses rendered beneath centre

- on how language proficiency affects the expansion of career options, projects, and collaboration.

(e.g.: *In case I will get a job abroad or have colleagues who speak English; In my opinion, a high level of English is crucial because it facilitates effective communication in international projects, access to a broader range of technical resources, and collaboration with global teams; it is extremely important to speak English correctly because certain better jobs require this; Very important, because most of the companies hire people that can understand and speak English; It is very important due to interaction with other engineers from foreign countries; I would like to work for a foreign company*).

- on self – instruction and hands-on practice

(e.g.: *It's very important because most of the pieces come with instructions that are written in English and if you don't know the language, it can be a disaster assembling the pieces together; English is everywhere. In every instruction manual, or information about the engineering tools. Not all of them are translated in Romanian, so it's best to make sure you can understand everything how everything works even with the language barrier; English is very important in engineering since a high amount of field related terms come from English; In my opinion the English level is very important in my electronics engineering career because I want to work with people from other countries and see the way they are working*).

- improving access to technological and human resources

(e.g.: *Because working in this field of computer engineering makes you meet a lot of foreigners; In my opinion, English is very important in the engineering career because most of the programmes and apps are in English and understanding them is a must; English is crucial in engineering for communication, resources, and collaboration; I believe that English is very important in engineering because almost every programme is written in English*).

Participants' responses indicate that possessing a proficient level of English is essential for accessing superior employment opportunities, advancing one's career path, effectively communicating with colleagues, and achieving greater success. According to the survey, 84.1% of respondents think that speaking is the most important skill for their job development and may have the most significant influence on their future decisions.

e.g.: *I think speaking is one of the most relevant skills because people can understand you even if you make some mistake; to be able to master the interviews you need to master the language first; I think speaking is the most relevant for my future career because I will mostly need to talk with people/colleagues from other countries*.

Nevertheless, for 7.2% of the students, reading is the most relevant skill (e.g.: *In engineering you don't really speak that much or write; Everything is based on manual work and to make sure you understand how the machines work or what you need to do you need reading; My future job requires an advanced level on reading and understanding*) and 5.8% of participants consider writing as essential (especially those studying information technology who may need English in developing computer software). Only 2.9% of them selected listening as the most important skill for their



future career. However, based on their opinions, 52.2% of respondents believe they have a high level of proficiency in reading, whereas 23.2% excel in speaking, 18.8% in listening, and 5.8% in writing.

### 5.3. Enhancement of English language skills

The majority of participants admitted that their proficiency in spoken English improved throughout the initial year of their studies at the university as follows: 18.8% improved more than expected, 8.7% improved a lot, 5.8% significantly improved, 5.8% improved very much, 17.4% moderately improved, 14.5% somewhat improved. For example, 89.9% of students reported acquiring knowledge regarding business/workplace etiquette during their first year English course at the University, whereas 8.8% expressed uncertainty about their learning in this area, and 1.4% claimed to have not learned about the issue at all. Moreover, at the question *Have you learned to write formal/business emails during the first year of English study at the University?* their responses indicated that the majority of them, specifically 91.1%, opted to reply with a *yes*. As a result, the knowledge they have gained can be regarded as being relevant to their future job career development.

When questioned about their typical English conversation partners, 46.4% of the respondents indicated that they engage in conversations with peer video game players whilst 31.9% acknowledged conversing with friends. 8.7% of respondents admitted that they exclusively utilise English when interacting with their English teacher during their university English course, whereas 5.8% had the opportunity to engage in English conversations with tourists visiting their local area. The others suggested different options, including work colleagues, managers, and residents of locations abroad they could travel to. Moreover, the frequency of interactions in English ranges from *every day* (63.8%) to *rarely* (11.6%) with 1.4% using it *twice to three times a week*, 5.8% *frequently*, 10.1% using it *once a week*, 7.2% *once in a while*. Interestingly, the option *never* was not selected by any of the participants, which may be an essential aspect of their self-awareness regarding the impact of English in their future development. The participants' preferences for conversation topics were ranked as follows, based on the checkboxes they selected: films/TV programmes (71%), video games (59.4%), technology (58%), travel (47.8%), current events (46.4%), food (36.2%), sports (34.8%), books (31.9%). In order to enhance their language proficiency, a number of participants indicated that they utilise various internet platforms and applications, social media, AI chatbots, playing video games, watching films, listening to English podcasts, reading articles/books in English. Regarding their self-motivation goals or aspirations related to improving English in general and particularly, speaking skills, participants' responses range as shown in the chart below.

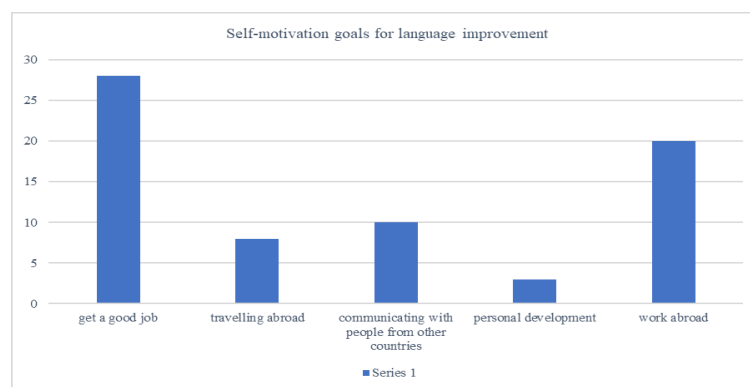


Fig. 4 The clustered column presents the primary factors that drive students to enhance their language proficiency.

The majority of the participants considered that obtaining a rewarding job motivated them the most towards improving language proficiency. Moreover, working abroad can be another significant driver of increased self-motivation. Another goal that can sufficiently motivate some of the participants may be represented by the opportunity to communicate with people from other countries. For others, travelling abroad and enhancing personal development may be beneficial ways to motivate themselves.

## 6. Conclusions

Language skills extend beyond the ability to form grammatically correct sentences and are essential for a successful career in engineering. The goal of the study was to assess students' needs to improve their language skills after completing two semesters of English courses specifically designed for engineering domains. The questions were centred on the students' learning experience in their first year English courses and on their self-experience with methods, content and strategies to learn English. Moreover, the survey-based questionnaire was conducted to ascertain the level of self-assurance among the students in regards to job interviews and group discussions. A significant number of students were identified as requiring improvement in their language proficiency. Moreover, an increased in the number of English courses per semester may impact positively their language proficiency. Therefore, conducting a needs assessment was a necessary requirement in order to comprehend the needs and expectations of the learners. This served to establish a relevant learning environment, as the primary goal of English courses is to improve students' employability skills.

Engineering students may encounter a highly demanding and recruitment procedure that requires them to demonstrate their skills in English communication. In addition to possessing proficiency in the field of expertise, it is crucial for students to have practical experiences of the language that will be necessary in their future professional environments. An advanced level in all language skills may be a prerequisite for all engineering students interested in securing rewarding future jobs. Proficiency in the English language may be crucial for undergraduates' professional endeavours as it has the potential to open up a world of opportunities and greatly improve their chances of success in their future jobs.

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