

# Advancing Career Opportunities: Employers' Perspectives Into The Role Of English Proficiency And Communication Skills In Boosting Employability

Macy Wong<sup>1</sup>, Lam, C. Y.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Division of Business and Hospitality Management, College of Professional and Continuing Education, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Hong Kong

<sup>2</sup>College of Professional and Continuing Education, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Hong Kong

<sup>1</sup>macy.wong@cpce-polyu.edu.hk, <sup>2</sup>cyilam@cpce-polyu.edu.hk

---

**Abstract**– Employers expect university graduates entering the job market to be well-equipped with the core skills of English Language Communicative Competence (ELCC). Proficiency in English facilitates better collaboration with global partners and enhances overall organisational performance. Although Higher Education (HE) providers continue to develop employability skills, there might still be a mismatch between the ELCC of graduates entering the job market and employers' expectations. Also, the development and usage of ELCC might be more complicated than ever, especially as educational technologies continue to evolve and integrate more deeply into our learning environments (e.g. AI-powered chatbots, speech recognition technology). The study seeks to consider the importance of English proficiency and communication skills in the Hong Kong job market, the relative importance of English proficiency and communication skills, and employers' expectations and requirements for new graduate employees. It builds a foundation for HE providers to provide better training to prepare graduates for the workplace. This investigation draws theoretical underpinnings from the social capital theory and the competency-based education and training (CBET) framework. The data for this paper were from semi-structured interviews conducted with 20 Hong Kong employers in the private sector who were in a position to recruit employees. The data was analysed using MAXQDA software to facilitate this coding process, enhancing the efficiency and accuracy of data analysis. The research unveiled that employers in Hong Kong generally have some expectations and requirements of newly hired graduates, like Mandarin and English, which were consistently highlighted as crucial due to widespread business use.

**Keywords**– Higher Education Providers, Employability, Employers' Perspectives, English Language Communicative Competence, University Graduates

---

## I. INTRODUCTION

Recognized as a global financial and business centre, Hong Kong occupies a unique position for international trade and commerce with a diverse range of industries and a highly competitive job market. With free market economy, Hong Kong act as a gateway to China, attracts multinational corporations, investors, and entrepreneurs from around the world. Statistics indicate the total count of non-Hong Kong companies registered in Hong Kong rose from 11,061 in 2018 to 15,126 in 2024, reflecting an increase of approximately 36.5% (Companies Registry, 2024). In 2023, Hong Kong recorded a total of 9,960 regional headquarters, regional offices, and local offices established by parent companies situated outside the region (Census and Statistics Department, 2024). This increase signifies Hong Kong's strategic importance in the Asia-Pacific region for multinational corporations, making English as a lingua franca for professionals to collaborate with global partners, negotiate contracts, and navigate in the multicultural business environments. According to Chan (2019), English language and communication skills are crucial for senior staff to effectively engage with partners and clients around the world. For other employees, English language and communication skills affect their ability to communicate with colleagues, present ideas, and engage in discussion. Therefore, the development of strong English language proficiency and workplace communication skills is a key priority for Hong Kong's workforce to remain competitive in the global market, regardless of the job positions (Arkoudis, et. al., 2015).

Consequently, employers value English proficiency and strong communication skills. As an international business hub, Hong Kong's workforce must navigate diverse global markets, making effective communication in English a critical skill that enhances employability. Employers expect

university graduates entering the job market to be well-equipped with the core skills of English Language Communicative Competence (ELCC), no matter which field or industry they are in (Li, 2021). Good communication skills and English proficiency are often positively associated with graduate employability (Singh & Singh, 2008). Due to time constraints and globalization, career readiness means that graduates must be ready for the employment market. Among the skills expected of graduates, ELCC is considerably sought after by employers to perform effective and efficient work-based tasks. Proficiency in English not only facilitates better collaboration with global partners but also enhances overall organizational performance. Although Higher Education (HE) providers continue to develop employability skills, there might still be a mismatch between the ELCC of graduates entering the job market and employers' expectations. Consequently, graduates who demonstrate English proficiency and communication skills are often preferred, highlighting the pivotal role they play in career advancement and success. Furthermore, the development and usage of ELCC might be more complicated than ever, especially as educational technologies (EdTech) continue to evolve and integrate more deeply into our learning environments (e.g. AI-powered chatbots, speech recognition technology). For university graduates who lack solid work experience, the ability to communicate effectively in English serves as a key differentiator when entering the workforce, influencing employability and long-term career advancement (Arkoudis et al., 2015; Wong & Wong, 2024). Among various studies in Asia-Pacific on students' perception of English language proficiency and employability, students did recognize the importance of English for securing employment (Zainuddin et al., 2019). However, with the consideration of Hong Kong's fast-paced business environment, employers require talents who are readily prepared at the moment of graduation, to ensure their smooth transition to the workplace. This is pivotal for employers to have more time for university graduates to receive on-the-job training, rather than spending time on basic communication skills. Nonetheless, employers complain that today's graduates lack soft skills such as written communication and interpersonal skills, and there is often a major skill gap in what graduates possess (Matsouka & Mihail, 2016; Wong & Wong, 2024). This study examines employers' views on the importance of English proficiency and communication skills for university graduates who want to work in the Hong Kong job market. Indeed, these two distinctive elements are often collated; thus, it is important to consider which is more important to employers. This investigation draws theoretical underpinnings from the social capital theory and the competency-based education and training (CBET) framework. The present study seeks to consider the importance of English proficiency and communication skills in the Hong Kong job market, the relative importance of English proficiency and communication skills, and the expectations and requirements of employers for new graduate employees. It builds a foundation for HE providers to provide better training to prepare graduates for the workplace.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### A. Hong Kong Labour Market & Talent Demands

The labour market in Hong Kong is undergoing a transitional phase, characterized by both opportunities and challenges for university graduates seeking employment. According to the latest report from the Census and Statistics Department (2025b), the seasonally adjusted unemployment rate from February to April 2025 stood at 3.4%, a slight increase from the previous period's 3.2%. This rise, coupled with a decrease in the labour force to 3,806,500 and total employment to 3,677,100, indicates a competitive job market that may pose difficulties for new graduates entering the workforce. While these trends do not only cover a single industry, food and beverage service, transportation, construction, and professional and business services they have experienced notable increases in unemployment rates (Census and Statistics Department, 2025a). This suggests particular challenges for graduates with these majors of study. While driven by an increase in inbound visitors and new consumption trends, the market shows resilience in sectors such as tourism, catering, hospitality, and the retail industry (Census and Statistics Department, 2025a). A recent survey published by KPMG (2025) indicates that 44% of C-level executives anticipate headcount expansion in 2025 within Hong Kong and the Greater Bay Area (GBA), yet 97% of respondents in professional services, public sector, and financial services report challenges in securing suitable talent. These dynamics suggest that while opportunities exist in the current local market, graduates must possess highly sought-after skills to navigate this competitive landscape effectively.

Indeed, the rising proportion of mainland students in Hong Kong's universities further complicates the employability landscape for graduates. In 2024 academic year, mainland students account for approximately 70.2% of non-local undergraduate students in public universities, totaling 10,358 out of 14,756 non-local students (University Grants Committee Secretariat, 2025). This reflects a significant rise from 50% six years prior. Shepard and Rose (2023) reported that mainland Chinese students, primarily Mandarin speakers, often face greater difficulties in English proficiency compared to their local Cantonese-speaking and international peers. Their difficulties are across writing, reading, and listening. These challenges stem from lower vocabulary knowledge, unfamiliarity with academic and technical terminology, and limited exposure to diverse English varieties, which could adversely affect their employability in roles requiring strong English communication skills, which is a critical asset in Hong Kong's globalized economy (Li, 2021; Shepard & Rose, 2023).

#### *B. English Proficiency*

English proficiency is the capability to effectively speak, write, read, and understand the English language. It encompasses a command of grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and communication skills. In Hong Kong, English proficiency is considered a form of cultural capital and in the labour market. Other than academic transcript, standardized tests such as the International English Language Testing System (IELTS), Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL), and Cambridge English Qualifications are widely used to certify English language proficiency levels, with scores such as an IELTS band of 6.0 or higher or a TOEFL iBT score of 61 often serving as benchmarks for professional and academic contexts (O'Loughlin, 2011). Some job opportunities have also been labeled as requiring a certain level of proficiency in the English proficiency test as an entry requirement. For office work, fluent language proficiency can enhance effective collaboration among diverse teams to improve overall productivity. For customer-oriented work, higher language competence can better serve clients and address concerns to enhance overall customer relations and improve sales. In nearby Malaysia, several reports point out that a poor command of English and lack of communication skills are significant barriers to employment for fresh graduates (Zainuddin et al., 2019). Zhou et al. (2020) study found that English language skills are associated with improved labour market performance with higher earnings. Efficient workforces also tend to communicate with English. Pertaining career advancement, employers often prioritize English proficiency for managerial and senior roles that require interaction with foreign clients (Li, 2021).

#### *C. English Communication Skills*

Communication skills are defined as the ability to convey information clearly and effectively through verbal and non-verbal means, including speaking, listening, writing, and interpreting body language (Oneri Uzun, 2021). In the context of Hong Kong's multicultural and globalized business environment, most job interviews are conducted in English. Other than candidate's background and CV, employers often form judgement of the interviewees' ability to communicate and express themselves in English, which is critical for roles involving collaboration and client interaction. Thomas et al. (2016) expose employers view core communication skills as inter-alia, making presentations, taking part in technical discourse, confidently explain and justify actions, processes and decisions to co-workers and line-managers, and communicate effectively across a multi-cultural/ multi-national workforce. Hence, a candidate's verbal competence is one of the indispensable criteria sought after by employers apart from their hard skills (Clokie & Fourie, 2016). DuPre and Williams (2011) revealed that while graduates usually acknowledge that communication skills are among the top five skills sought by employers, they often lack proficiency, highlighting a significant mismatch. In virtual settings, effective communication has also become increasingly important due to the rise of flexible work arrangements, further emphasizing its relevance for graduate employability (Randstad, 2024). The ability to communicate proficiently in English directly enhances graduates' prospects, as it equips them to meet the demands of Hong Kong's international business landscape, where clear and professional communication is a key determinant of workplace success.

#### *D. English Language Communicative Competence (ELCC) and Educational Technologies (EdTech)*

English Language Communicative Competence (ELCC) is defined as the ability to use the English language effectively and appropriately in a variety of communicative contexts. Spolsky (1989) defines

communication competence not only limited to linguistics, but also covers sociolinguistic aspects, such as the understanding and applying social norms of language use. It is the capacity to use English appropriately and effectively across various communicative contexts (Spolsky, 1989). Ehlers (2020) defines communication competence as one of the Co-Creation future skills when entering the era of Future of Work. In order to develop a communication competence profile, students are to train up their language proficiency, presentation competence, capacity for dialogue, communication readiness, consensus orientation, and openness toward criticism (Ehlers, 2020). While English proficiency typically focuses on linguistic knowledge assessed through standardized tests, and communication skills comprise a broader set of abilities that facilitate effective interaction, ELCC is a comprehensive framework that emphasize practical application of English in real-world settings, integrate linguistic proficiency with the ability to communicate effectively (Oneri Uzun, 2021; Vorweg, 2015). Therefore, employers prioritize ELCC when recruiting graduate (Clokie & Fourie, 2016). Well-equipped ELCC influences the constitution of soft skills, such as leadership, collaboration, a personable communication style, and affects one's business acumen (Edmonds et al., 2023). Long-term workplace communication requirements for senior business professionals, highlight individuals' progress in their careers and communication demands evolve require not only technical language skills, but also the ability to manage complex interpersonal and cross-cultural interactions (Chan, 2019; Li, 2021). Consequently, graduates with high levels of ELCC are better positioned to meet these expectations to enhance their career prospects.

Nowadays, higher education institutions (HEIs) and employers are linking ELCC with educational technologies (EdTech) to enhance language learning. For instance, EdTech platforms have been developed to provide interactive activities like video lessons, quizzes, and games to improve English communicative skills. Also, more HEIs implemented VR and AR technologies to create immersive language learning experiences, as well as AI-powered language learning apps and multimedia resources (Schorr, Plecher, Eichhorn & Klinker, 2024). By integrating ELCC with EdTech, it is believed that learners can develop their language skills in a dynamic and interactive way.

### III. THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

#### A. Social Capital Theory

Social Capital Theory (SCT) involves three distinct concepts, including resources, structure, and relationships. Proposed by Bourdieu and Biggart (2002), SCT defines it as "the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance or recognition". It emphasizes the value derived from social networks, relationships, and norms that facilitate collective action and cooperation. Regarding employability, social capital refers to the networks and connections that individuals leverage to access job opportunities and career advancement (Bourdieu & Biggart, 2002). For university graduates, a high level of ELCC significantly enhances social capital by enabling them to build and maintain professional networks with international colleagues and organizations (Tomlinson, 2017). Using SCT, English language proficiency and communication is pivotal for graduate employability by providing access to job information, referrals, internship, and mentorship opportunities (Batistic & Tymon, 2017). Thus, the types of capital identified are viewed as essential resources that provide individuals with benefits and advantages. These resources encompass various human, social, cultural, identity, and psychosocial dimensions, which are gained through graduates' formal and informal experiences (Bourdieu & Biggart, 2002; Tomlinson, 2017). Consequently, SCT emphasizes that the level of ELCC of graduates is positively correlated to their perceived employability.

#### B. Competency-Based Education and Training (CBET)

Competence-based education and training (CBET) is characterized by a curriculum developed from an analysis of prospective or actual roles in modern society, aiming to certify student progress through demonstrated performance in various aspects of those roles. This approach defines competence as the integrated, performance-oriented capability of an individual or organization to achieve specific outcomes. (Gibbons & Grant, 1980; Wesselink, 2010). To distinguish it from traditional education, Mulder (2012); Wesselink (2010) emphasize several key characteristics: CBET integrates knowledge, skills, and attitudes into cohesive learning trajectories, equipping students to tackle complex real-world challenges. It focuses

on outcomes, ensuring that students can demonstrate specific competencies essential for employment and societal engagement. Learning occurs in authentic contexts, such as workplaces, to foster self-responsibility and reflection, to encourage students to take charge of their learning and develop lifelong skills. Moreover, teachers transition from being mere knowledge transmitters to coaches and facilitators, making CBET strongly connect theoretical learning with practical experience through workplace learning and industry partnerships. For Hong Kong's job market, CBET provides a framework that stresses the role of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in bridging the gap between graduates' ELCC versus industry demands (KPMG, 2025). This also draw the theoretical framework of this study, whereby analyzing employers' expectation of graduates, to suggest specific intervention using CBET to enhance students' overall English language proficiency and communication. This approach ensures that graduates achieve job market-relevant competencies, enhance graduate employability by aligning educational outcomes with the linguistic and communicative needs of Hong Kong's job market demand, thereby provide a structured framework for successful careers.

#### IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study utilized a qualitative research methodology to investigate employers' perspectives on the significance of English proficiency and communication skills for university graduates seeking employment in Hong Kong. A qualitative approach was deemed appropriate as it allows for an in-depth exploration of employers' perspectives, capturing the nuances and complexities of their views on graduate employability in relation to these skills. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 20 employers from diverse industries in the private sector, including Accounting, Aviation, Education, Finance, FMCG & Retail, GBA, Law, Logistics, Media, and Property Management. Employers were selected based on their experience in recruiting university graduates and their representation of key sectors in Hong Kong's economy. This is to ensure a broad range of insights reflective of Hong Kong's multifaceted economy. Table 1 presents the demographic data in this study. Data were collected through individual interviews conducted via Zoom, with each session audio-recorded after obtaining informed consent from participants adhering to ethical research standards. The interviews were transcribed verbatim and analyzed using thematic analysis with the assistance of MaxQDA to identify key patterns and themes related to employers' expectations for English proficiency and communication skills. The primary aim of the interviews was to assess the significance employers place on these skills during the hiring process and to understand their specific expectations for new graduate employees in these areas. The interview protocol was informed by existing literature on language skills and employability to ensure the questions were comprehensive and addressed gaps in current research (Rido, 2019; Thomas et al., 2016; Ting et al., 2017; Zainuddin et al., 2019). This approach allowed for a nuanced understanding of how these skills influence graduate employability across various sectors.

Pseudonym used in the paper	Number of Employers (n = 20)	Working industry / Nature of business of the company
E1,E2,E3,E4	4	Accounting
E5,E6,E7	3	Aviation
E8,E9	2	Education
E10	1	Finance
E11	1	FMCG & Retail
E12	1	Greater Bay Area (GBA)
E13	1	Law
E14,E15,E16,E17	4	Logistics
E18	1	Media
E19,20	2	Property Management

Table 1: Pseudonym and working industry of the employers interviewed

## V. FINDINGS

### A. Views on English Language Communicative Competence (ELCC)

Employers consistently define good English proficiency as characterized by linguistic accuracy, include appropriate vocabulary, clear and concise writing, and fluent verbal expression without grammatical errors. This ensures that messages are precise and professionally delivered, which is essential for workplace tasks such as report writing and email correspondence. E1 emphasized that the importance of concise and clear written English, highlight the need for precision in professional communication. Conversely, employers view communication skills as focusing on the effective transmission and reception of messages, emphasizing the importance of clarity, mutual understanding, and adaptability to different audiences. Like E11, it underscored that effective communication ensures the recipient understands the intended message and prioritizes practical outcomes over linguistic perfection. This involves adapting language and style to suit the audience, using appropriate tone, and engaging effectively with various stakeholders. They value communication skills for fostering collaboration and ensuring workplace interactions are productive.

“Proficiency is to write concisely and to the point, front and back are clear” (E1).

“The main point is the opposite party received your message” (E11).

Despite general acknowledgement of the importance of both English proficiency and communication skills, most of our interviewed employers prioritize communication skills in the workplace. The ability to convey ideas clearly, interact confidently, and adapt communication to different contexts is seen as more critical than linguistic perfection, particularly for roles that require frequent interpersonal engagement. This preference is evident across various industries, where effective communication is deemed essential for collaboration and operational success. However, some employers recognized that English proficiency and communication skills are complementary, with proficiency serving as a foundation for effective communication. E7 highlighted that linguistic proficiency alone does not guarantee effective communication, emphasizing the practical application of language skills. E8 acknowledged the value of both components but leaned toward communication skills. This suggests that the ability to engage effectively with others is paramount.

“I think communication skills are more important. Good language is not equivalent to performing good communication skills” (E7).

“Both are important but if I must select one from the two, then it would be communication skills” (E8).

Furthermore, the requirements for ELCC vary significantly across job roles, industries, and communication contexts. Employers indicated that frontline and customer-facing positions, such as those in customer service or sales, demand higher levels of spoken English and interpersonal communication skills to engage effectively with clients. E19, working in the property management sector, underscored the need for strong spoken English in customer-facing roles, where direct interaction is frequent. Media sector, like E18, also prioritized communication. In contrast, back-office or managerial roles often require stronger written proficiency for tasks like report writing or formal correspondence. The specific needs also depend on the audience (e.g., international clients versus local staff) and the communication channel (e.g., emails, presentations, or meetings). Apparently contextual variability of ELCC requirements depends on job role. E4 mention when preparing documents, English proficiency is comparatively significant, whereas E8 highlighted when discussing proposal with government, required both proficiency and communication skills.

“Customer service requires higher English language proficiency as we need to interact with the customers” (E19).

“The editors or journalists in charge of the Hong Kong local news do not need outstanding English proficiency, yet communication skill will be important because most of the people they encounter are locals.” (E18).

“Managers need to write reports, reporting skills is very important” (E20).

“Take my company as an example, if a person belongs to the company secretary department, responsible for services, as he/she may likely to write meeting minutes, company's internal/external documents, his/her requirement in English proficiency are relatively higher. Other departments,

such as accounting, require only standard English application level, as some time may only need to write an email according to a specific template, so they can handle it more easily.” (E4).

“For example, if I am communicating with the government, my English must be formal, precise, and accurate. All in all, different work tasks, targets, and even venues require different skillsets of English.” (E8).

#### *B. Importance of English Proficiency and Communication Skills in Workplace*

As employers rigorously evaluate ELCC to ensure candidates can meet workplace demands, English proficiency and communication skills are pivotal in the hiring process. All interviewed employers assessed these skills during recruitment, often through standardized English tests, written assessments, and verbal evaluations in interviews. Concerning academic credentials, employers placed significant emphasis on candidates’ academic backgrounds as initial indicators of their English proficiency. Key credentials reviewed included results from public examinations, university degrees, and its Grade Point Averages. Employers often assumed that graduates from reputable institutions had attained a certain level of English proficiency, whereas academic records provided a baseline for assessing a candidate’s linguistic foundation. When standardized English test such as IELTS and TOEFL are not mandatory in some jobs’ application, most employers considered such results to serve as supplementary evidence of language competence. As mentioned by E9, he noted that 70-80% of candidates did not provide these standardized test results, relying instead on local qualifications. Yet some employers, such as E17, viewed these tests as less relevant for workplace readiness.

“We will also ask about their HKDSE results. And of course, we will see which university they graduated from, because to a certain extent it also reflects their achievements and academic results” (E2).

“We mainly focus on candidates’ public examination results, like A-Level and HKDSE” (E4).

“As we mainly recruit university graduates. If they are degree holders, we assume they can attain a certain level in English” (E12).

“Yes, we will consider interviewees’ DSE English Results, University English results, and TOEFL or IELTS results” (E20).

“I think we will not consider IELTS and TOEFL due to these tests are used for immigration or further study admission purposes” (E17).

To further evaluate practical English proficiency and communication skills, many employers administer in-house written tests and oral assessments during the interview process. These assessments were designed to gauge candidates’ ability to produce clear, accurate written English and communicate effectively in spoken English. Situational questions, such as those noted by E19, further test candidates’ practical language use. He also exhibits a preference for candidates with overseas education and believes the experiences could enhance language proficiency and cultural exposure.

“In our interview procedure, you must complete the written test before the actual face-to-face interview. It depends on what we want to test candidates for, from technology to grammar. Oral and interviews will be conducted after the written examination. Generally speaking, both Chinese and English are covered to test their ability to express their speech” (E4).

“Our first task of interview is a written test, which is related to accounting or other services” (E12).

“Candidates would be tested with situational questions, and they need to answer how they would handle those situations. This way we can test their overall English proficiency, such as words that they have to use on a daily basis, like ‘pipe’ and ‘water leakage” (E19).

“Actually, we have a non-disclosed preference towards these candidates [candidates who received overseas education because their cultural exposure and language proficiency should be stronger]” (E19).

Concerning daily operation, ELCC is fundamental for all organizations. High competencies enhance workplace efficiency, allow employees to collaborate effectively, interpret technical materials, and engage with diverse stakeholders. Employers across sectors emphasized the necessity of English for tasks like drafting reports, composing emails, and communicating with international clients. In the accounting sector, precise English is required for financial reports and client correspondence, while in logistics, it facilitates coordination with global shipping partners. In property management, understanding complex

legal documents such as the Building Management Ordinance, requires strong English proficiency. Highlighted by E19, English proficiency in both spoken and written is crucial in client interactions to maintain professionalism and avoid embarrassment from poor-quality work. Alluded by E2, E3, E4, E6, E13, E14, and E17, where their headquarters or main clients are located overseas, fluency in ELCC is particularly noteworthy for reporting duties to the head office and conducting business through online channel in a multinational organization, reassure that messages were conveyed clearly. Cantonese or mandarin on another hand is just for casual internal communication, or with Chinese client. In summary, English's dominance in daily operations underscored its role as the primary communication medium in many organizations.

“One with poor English proficiency may not understand them and it will be difficult to enforce the rules .....When facing clients, we care about how clients would feel when listening to our staffs’ English and that is why English language proficiency in terms of spoken level is so important. On the other hand, written English is also very important. Written work with grammatical error, wrong choice of words, and very Chinese style English [is unacceptable]. Very often we would issue letters or notices in our industry, and if they produce poor quality work, even for our managers or senior managers, we will feel very shameful.” (E19).

“The director of my department is French. We also have colleagues who come from France and other places.....We are all required to communicate with them in English, whether by email, letter or meeting.” (E4).

“For international and regional offices, we use English as the common communication language.” (E6).

“English is used in all our reports and emails to clients, ensuring clarity and professionalism in our daily operations.” (E9)

“We all used English in daily operations due to the headquarter and senior management coming from France.” (E14).

For individuals, their level of ELCC greatly influences opportunities for job rotations and career advancement. 15% of our interviewed employers associate greater proficiency with improved job prospects, enabling employees to have diverse roles and build broader experience. One of them is E4 from the accounting sector. The ability to communicate effectively is the key to facilitate cross-departmental collaboration and adaptability, which are essential for job rotations and career mobility. This is particularly evident in industries like aviation, accounting, media, and logistics, where employees must navigate in multilingual environments. These findings also echo to Zhou et al. (2020) study, where individuals with higher English proficiency tend to earn more and perform better in the labor market. Relating to professional networks, E19 pointed out that high levels of ELCC enable individuals to engage effectively with international colleagues and organizations and to gain access to opportunities like referrals and mentorship. Consistent with SCT, ELCC strengthens graduates’ social capital through improved professional networking, crucial for career progression (Tomlinson, 2017).

“When facing clients, we care about how clients would feel when listening to our staffs’ English” (E19).

“We professionally serve European and American clients, and English communication is critical. If he/she has an advantage in language, indeed he/she will be our first priority to offer rotation opportunities to handle this type of duties.” (E4).

### C. Employers’ Expectations and Requirements for New Graduate Employees

Moving to the most concerning topic for graduates: what employers expect? The result revealed that employers commonly expected new graduates to demonstrate a robust command of English that was sufficient for them to perform a range of professional tasks effectively from the outset. These could be proficiency in writing, speaking, and comprehension; The ability to produce clear, concise, and grammatically accurate written communication, as mentioned by E19 in the previous section - to uphold a professional standard and prevent discomfort from subpar work quality. Similarly, E1 expected graduates to have precision and simplicity command of English to meet workplace standards. Meanwhile, fluency and clarity in spoken English are equally critical. E11 reveals the importance of accurate and understandable speech, E2 articulated that the expectation to comprehend and interpret English

accurately in professional contexts. Employers generally expected new graduates to apply for their ELCC immediately upon entering the workforce with minimal need for additional training in basic communication skills. If such was needed, it would be based on existing resources like an email template, as outlined by E4. All these highlight the dual importance of effective expression and comprehension for fostering collaboration and preventing miscommunications.

“We expect a college student to express their wordings simply and accurately, meanwhile having an acceptable level in writing” (E1).

“Smooth and with correct pronunciation.” (E11).

“He can communicate and express himself accurately and understand the meaning of others” (E2).

“We will provide sufficient email templates for their reference. It is acceptable if there are low-level grammatical or sentence structure mistakes. They will be slowly crafted from senior staff and reference templates” (E4).

Beyond technical proficiency, employers place significant value on communicative attributes that enhance professional interaction. Our interview data concluded that confidence in using English is a key factor. E11 unveiled that confidence was seen as a critical factor in making a positive impression during interviews and in workplace interactions. As mentioned by E9 and E16, maintaining a professional demeanor was also a vital quality to maintain a positive work environment. Specific requirements varied depending on the job role and sector. In customer-facing roles such as those in property management or aviation, spoken English and interpersonal skills were prioritized to ensure positive client interactions. In contrast, roles in accounting or legal professions placed greater emphasis on written proficiency and attention to detail in documentation. The financial sector thus prioritized written skills for operational staff over frontline communication. In brief, the attributes of interpersonal skills were closely related to the context of ELCC and were valued by employers.

“We would expect good confidence and good expression from the candidate” (E11).

“Attitude and manners are important” (E9).

“A good attitude and good tone and good manners” (E16).

“Good body language, the attitude is approachable, and good listening skills.” (E5).

“Whether he or she is very timid or very pleasant and willing to interact with others. This is a quality that is a must in our industry” (E19).

“The nature of our work is mostly about reporting and the process of internal audit involves interviewing clients and understanding clients’ internal control. So, they [new graduate employees] may be required to jot down all internal control system deficiencies raised by the clients’ and know how it can be improved” (E3).

Given Hong Kong’s role as a gateway to China and its diverse business landscape, when employers were asked to prioritize the top three languages besides English that they preferred in graduates, all interviewed employers emphasized the value of proficiency in additional languages, particularly Mandarin and Cantonese. Fluency in Cantonese is critical for effective interactions with local staff and clients, facilitating seamless daily operations and internal communications. Mandarin is increasingly prioritized due to Hong Kong’s growing economic ties with Mainland China, enable graduates to engage effectively with clients and partners in Chinese-speaking regions, as mentioned by various employers (E4, E9, E11, E16). Proficiency in additional languages, such as Japanese or Korean, could provide a competitive advantage in industries with specific international clientele. E13 and E17 has prioritized Spanish as it was South America's second most spoken language and valuable for global business. This also supported by E9. Therefore, graduates must develop diverse linguistic versatility to meet Hong Kong’s dynamic job market demands, better for graduate employability.

“Cantonese is the mother language and the workplace environment of Hong Kong. Putonghua (i.e., commonly used in the maritime industry); Spanish (the largest language population in South America and for international business purposes).” (E17).

“Cantonese (i.e., workplace environment); Putonghua (i.e., the client); Spanish (i.e., the second largest language).” (E13).

"This is a bonus, but English and Cantonese will be the most important. If he is proficient in other languages, such as French or Mandarin, these will be bonus points, but Mandarin will take precedence over other languages." (E9).

#### D. Suggestions for Higher Education Institutions

With a wide variety of expectations from the labour market, it underscores the urgent need for HEIs to better equip graduates with the skills in ELCC for relevant communicative purposes in the workplace. One point many employers stressed is the need for cultural and global exposure opportunities. This was not limited to study tours, but also included exchange programs, overseas internships, and summer camps that developed students' language proficiency and cultural adaptability. By being immersed in native-speaking environments, these programs provided opportunities by forcing students to engage with native speakers, gradually enhance their intercultural communication skills and prepare them for multinational workplaces (Avgousti, 2018). Similarly, internship program and experience in a different country than their home institution improved interpersonal skills, language skills and cultural competence, which all expected from prospective employers that we have mentioned in the previous section, making these programs a valuable component of ELCC training (Di Pietro, 2022). E4 and E11 explicitly highlighted the benefits of such real-world experiences, noting that they broadened students' global perspectives and improved their ability to communicate across cultures. E4 further explained that if travel abroad was restricted, summer activities could be conducted locally with native speakers as hosts.

"Students exchange programmes which let students travel aboard can be held. Or maybe summer camps, these activities can even be held in Hong Kong. Even if you could not travel aboard, you can still join (these activities). Native speakers could be invited to lead these activities." (E11).

Besides global exposure, building confidence in using English is a critical aspect of effective communication, employers suggested that HEIs provide more opportunities for students to practice their skills through interactive methods. Presentations, debates, and casual conversations can help students become more comfortable and effective communicators. E19 and E13 advocated immersive learning approaches to improve pronunciation and speaking skills beyond traditional grammar-focused instruction. E5 and E6 explained that these workshops could also include competitions to guide students in setting personal goals throughout their learning journey. This possibility provides students with platforms to apply their skills in practical scenarios. Additionally, these workplace-specific workshops and training can be integrated into academic programs to prepare students for professional tasks, such as formal business email writing, as pointed out by E16. E3 stated that these interactive methods were seen as vital for fostering the confidence to make presentations that is needed to navigate professional interactions in roles that require engagement or public speaking.

"Immerse students in English-speaking culture and use interactive teaching methods to improve their pronunciation and speaking skills" (E19).

"Revamp the curriculum and provide the communication or speaking skill workshops." (E13).

"Providing workshops including listening, reading, and oral. Also, some activities can train up the students in motivation and goal setting." (E5).

"External competition and the student activities make them gain the reception and translation experience." (E6).

"Before they enter the workplace, we hope they can understand some formal business mode [email-writing] in advance, such as format." (E16).

"HEIs can provide more opportunities for students to make presentations and to train up their confidence in chatting with others." (E3).

Nevertheless, the resources available within HEIs are fundamental to nurture career-ready graduates. A large proportion of interviewed employers upheld the same view as E20, who recommended HEIs offer students hands-on experience in applying English language skills in real-world settings, including internships and work placements. These experiential learning opportunities allowed students to understand professional communication norms even during academic study, thus building up language proficiency, confidence, and abilities at an early stage (Di Pietro, 2022). E2 emphasized the value of early connections between students and potential employers through work placements, noting that such exposure helped students grasp workplace expectations. Within institutions, E11 suggested that utilizing

language centers and sufficient tutors are also critical to support skill development. Yet, one difficulty is that these experiences rely much on the university's industrial linkage to foster collaboration. It is thus recommended and better for universities integrate these experiences into curricula. By promoting resources-rich setting, HEIs can ensure graduates have developed practical communication abilities to better meet employer expectations with minimal on-the-job training.

“Arrange more internship programs and offer more collaboration programmes with different companies. So, the students know what communication skills they need when entering the society and working in companies.” (E20).

“Link a connection between them and their potential employers earlier, or get them into the workplace earlier, for example, work placements.” (E2).

“I think this [language centre] is a possible way to enrich graduates' ability using existing resources.” (E11)

## VI. DISCUSSION

Based on the findings, it can be seen that employers in Hong Kong prioritize ELCC as essential for graduate employability. The distinction between proficiency and communication skills reflects employers' nuanced understanding of ELCC. English proficiency ensures technical accuracy, while communication skills enable graduates to apply language skills in real-world scenarios. This dual focus aligns with the literature, which positions ELCC as a combination of linguistic and sociolinguistic competencies (Spolsky, 1989). The emphasis on communication reflects the dynamic nature of the workplace, where clarity and adaptability often outweigh technical language skills. This prioritization aligns with findings from Ting et al. (2017), who valued communication skills over English proficiency for graduate employability, except in roles requiring extensive English use. Employers in globally oriented organizations note that a baseline level of English proficiency is necessary to support effective communication skills, particularly for tasks involving international stakeholders (Clement & Murugavel, 2018). From our data, 95% of our interviewed employers also noted the presence of diverse workforces in multinational organizations, including staff from Hong Kong, Mainland China, and other countries, where reliance on English is particularly pronounced. The mode of communication includes using English as a common language via emails and instant messaging platform. This shows that English facilitates efficient task execution and maintains professional standards in globalized workplaces, while Cantonese is only used for informal oral interactions (Yamao & Sekiguchi, 2015). This finding also reflects the variation in ELCC in Hong Kong's multicultural and multinational business environment, where English serves as a lingua franca for external and formal communications (Evans, 2010). In conclusion, this aligns with SCT, which suggests that ELCC significantly enhances graduates' ability to forge robust professional networks, thereby boosting their employability (Tomlinson, 2017). ELCC empowers graduates to connect with diverse colleagues and stakeholders, and foster trust and collaboration in multinational workplaces. This capability not only strengthens their career prospects but also positions them as valuable assets in globalized industries. Moving on to the expectations of employers. From our findings and previous scholars such as Finley (2023), indicate that employers expect graduates to be career-ready to apply their English proficiency immediately in the workplace without extensive onboarding in language skills, to reduce the time needed for extensive on-the-job language training. At a minimum, employers expect graduates to write formal business emails proficiently and deliver fluent, professional presentations. They value graduates who can quickly adapt to professional communication demands and leverage their ELCC to perform tasks effectively from the start. Not only does this apply to proficiency, but also to the communicative attributes. Employers prioritize communication skills for their role in teamwork and leadership, seeking graduates who can engage confidently and professionally to ensure effective collaboration and client satisfaction (Ting et al., 2017). As E14 has mentioned, "All areas are expected to have high English language proficiency". Moreover, the preference for multilingual proficiency also means graduates with additional language skills can enhance their employability and facilitate cross-cultural interactions. These factors not only influence the likelihood of securing a job position but also have an impact on career mobility, including opportunities for job rotation. All these correlates with SCT and Zhou et al. (2020) study: the higher the level of ELCC, the greater the possibility that graduates can

leverage for job opportunities and career advancement. Employers prioritize ELCC during hiring, though a threshold level of proficiency is necessary for effective communication (Ting et al., 2017). For graduates, this means that rigorous evaluation of ELCC is conducted across the hiring process. At the very least, candidates are required to demonstrate their ability, with their basic writing skills and oral communication scrutinized during interviews. This emphasis reflects the expectation that graduates possess at least basic proficiency in writing clear emails, speaking fluently, and understanding workplace communication norms. The evaluation of these skills is particularly stringent due to the city's role as an international business hub, where English is essential for engaging with global clients and stakeholders. As for the above, it is undoubtedly that ELCC is a critical determinant of graduate employability. Despite their importance, many graduates in Hong Kong still lack adequate English proficiency and communication skills, creating the skill gap between employer expectations and candidate abilities. Our findings show the gap is particularly pronounced among mainland Chinese students, who may have limited exposure to English. With a rising proportion of mainland students studying in Hong Kong, this may hinder their ability to compete in the job market, leading to reduced employability, and challenges in performing workplace tasks effectively. A recent report from EF Education (2024) also indicates a decline in English proficiency among Hong Kong's young adults, with Hong Kong ranking 32nd out of 116 countries and scoring 549, reflect a trending shift to "moderate proficiency." This stresses the urgent need for HEIs to adopt strategies at program and institutional levels, so as to train students' communicative competence during their study period. For HEIs, one essential consideration is the shift of learning models. In the post-pandemic period, many classes conducted in the university shifted from traditional lecture-based teaching to blended learning models. This is not limited to arts subjects; some science lab sessions have shifted parts of their learning to online mode. Blended learning is the mode of learning that integrates online and face-to-face instruction, incorporates diverse pedagogical approaches include online lectures, face-to-face tutorials, problem-based learning, virtual reality learning, and case-based group discussions into one (Hrastinski, 2019). Studies have shown that blended learning students completed more learning activities compared to face-to-face students and spent less time on tasks (Cao, 2023; Sylvia, 2024). In Sylvia (2024) study, nearly 70% of the students preferred the blended learning format for its flexibility. The promotion of self-regulated learning is also a critical factor in language acquisition and its learning efficiency (Cao, 2023; Sylvia, 2024). Moreover, Thomas et al. (2016) concluded that university students need to be taught English for communication purposes that cover both specialized discourse fields and broader generic employability skills and competencies. With the recent trend of AI technologies, it is suggested that HEIs to consider the trend of blended learning, discipline specificity, and use of educational technologies (EdTech) when refining curricula of each course and programme in each academic year, so to provide high-quality education while training up students' ELCC to enhance graduate employability. Besides, HEIs are encouraged to strengthen industrial collaborations and partnerships to provide students with practical exposure opportunities. From our data, many employers have stressed the need to provide cultural and global exposure opportunities for students, allowing them to be immersed in a working environment and native-speaking environment to enhance ELCC. The partnership may start from the industry that schools' programmes have integrated discipline-specific English language course, blended learning, or EdTech, so students already equipped with a basic level of English proficiency. The internships can be designed to be a credit-bearing compulsory course, serving as a complementarity to the study. For instance, HEIs can partner with global financial firm to facilitate internships for business administration scheme students to allow them to practice discipline-specific communication tasks, such as preparing financial reports in English to strengthen their linguistic and sociolinguistic competencies (Roshid & Kankaanranta, 2025). The CBET framework underpins this approach by emphasizing learning in authentic workplace contexts, where students demonstrate performance in professional roles to foster self-responsibility and reflection (Mulder, 2012). Schools' teachers and course coordinators transit their roles from knowledge transmitters to coaches, to guide students to connect theoretical learning with practical experience. This can be achieved by regular reflective discussion (Mulder, 2012). For employers, they can also support students' development by offer tailored sessions on workplace English, presentation skills, appraisal writing during the non-working period, as well as provide access to digital language-learning platforms to support students or graduates in

continuing to improve their English skills independently (Qing, 2016). This approach not only bridges the gap between academic curricula and industry expectations but also equips students with the ability to navigate workplace communication norms and develop lifelong skills. In fact, this experience refers to the pedagogical approach, namely Work-Integrated Learning (WIL). It encompasses mainly work placement that aims to bridge the gap between theory and practice (Cooper et al., 2010). WIL stresses the effective integration of the curriculum between academic learning with practical (Ferns et al., 2014). From a macroscopic viewpoint, the learning outcomes should be clearly defined and aligned with the objectives, as well as the needs of collaboration with industry partners. The practicum should also be relevant to the student's field of study. From a microscopic viewpoint, structured reflection, debriefing, supervision, and mentoring are also the key aspects to consider in WIL curricula, as these experiences serve as students' self-assessment of their learning process (Cooper et al., 2010). Therefore, other than the feedback from the school's coordinator and employers, students are also required to engage in pre-field and post-field assessment as a reflection to evaluate their skills and competencies in relation to industry standards. This process aligns with the principles of "Assessment as Learning" and helps them identify strengths and areas for improvement related to ELCC and their skillsets (Cooper et al., 2010; Ferns et al., 2014). Furthermore, universities can conduct exchange programmes with an overseas partner institution to expose students to diverse cultural contexts. As per our findings, schools are also suggested to hold pre-departure sessions with these students and establish a language center within the institution to support their skill development. By embedding these exposure opportunities in a resource-rich environmental support within the study curricula, HEIs can help students develop a well-rounded ELCC profile.

## VII. CONCLUSION

This study adopts the qualitative approach to underscore the critical role of ELCC in enhancing graduate employability in Hong Kong's competitive job market. Employers across diverse industries emphasize that ELCC comprise of both English proficiency and communication skills. These two skills are indispensable for effective workplace performance and career advancement. Literature review and our findings reveal that while English proficiency provides the linguistic foundation necessary for tasks such as report writing and formal correspondence, communication skills are prioritized for their ability to foster collaboration, adaptability, and clarity in interpersonal interactions. This aligns with SCT as a higher level of ELCC enables graduates to build professional networks to facilitate access to job opportunities and mentorship. CBET framework further supports the need for higher education institutions to integrate practical, workplace-relevant communication training into curricula to bridge the gap between graduate skills and employer expectations. Notably, the study identifies a skill gap among mainland Chinese students that hinders their employability in Hong Kong's globalized economy. Employers expect graduates to demonstrate immediate career readiness, with minimal need for basic communication training. This has underscored the urgency for educational reforms and the necessity for HE providers to enhance ELCC training through blended learning, industry partnerships, and global exposure opportunities to better prepare graduates for the dynamic demands of Hong Kong's workforce. To advance this research, future studies should explore the longitudinal impact of specific ELCC training programs on graduate employability and career progression in Hong Kong. For instance, future studies should investigate how the pedagogical approaches of discipline-specific English courses influence graduates' workplace performance. This could provide actionable insights for HEIs' curriculum design. Additionally, examining the role of EdTech, such as AI-driven language learning platforms, in enhancing ELCC could address the evolving needs of the job market. Such studies are crucial for both HEIs and employers to design strategies that align with the city's role as a global business hub. Exploring these areas will not only refine educational practices but also strengthen Hong Kong's position as a competitive player in the Asia-Pacific region by nurturing graduates equipped to navigate complex, multicultural workplace environments.

## REFERENCES

- [1] Arkoudis, S., Baik, C., Bexley, E., & Doughney, L. (2015). English Language Proficiency and Employability Framework, Centre for the Study of Higher Education The University of Melbourne (<https://doi.org/10.13140/2.1.3565.8569>)

- [2] Avgousti, M. I. (2018). Intercultural communicative competence and online exchanges: a systematic review. *Computer Assisted Language Learning*, 31(8), 819-853. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09588221.2018.1455713>
- [3] Batic, S., & Tymon, A. (2017). Networking behaviour, graduate employability: A social capital perspective. *Education + Training*, 59, 374-388. <https://doi.org/10.1108/ET-06-2016-0100>
- [4] Bourdieu, P., & Biggart, N. W. (2002). The Forms of Capital. In (pp. 280-291). Blackwell Publishers Ltd. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9780470755679.ch15>
- [5] Cao, W. (2023). A meta-analysis of effects of blended learning on performance, attitude, achievement, and engagement across different countries. *Front Psychol*, 14, 1212056. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2023.1212056>
- [6] Census and Statistics Department. (2024). Report on Annual Survey of Companies in Hong Kong with Parent Companies Located outside Hong Kong. <https://www.censtatd.gov.hk/en/EIndexbySubject.html?pcode=B1110004&scode=360>
- [7] Census and Statistics Department. (2025a). Gross Domestic Product by Expenditure Component - First Quarter 2025. <https://www.censtatd.gov.hk/en/wbr.html?ecode=B10300012025QQ01&scode=250>
- [8] Census and Statistics Department. (2025b). Unemployment and underemployment statistics for February - April 2025 [https://www.censtatd.gov.hk/en/press\\_release\\_detail.html?id=5584](https://www.censtatd.gov.hk/en/press_release_detail.html?id=5584)
- [9] Chan, C. S. C. (2019). Long-term workplace communication needs of business professionals: Stories from Hong Kong senior executives and their implications for ESP and higher education. *English for Specific Purposes*, 56, 68-83. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.esp.2019.07.003>
- [10] Clement, A., & Murugavel, T. (2018). English for the Workplace: The Importance of English Language Skills for Effective Performance.
- [11] Clokie, T. L., & Fourie, E. (2016). Graduate Employability and Communication Competence: Are Undergraduates Taught Relevant Skills? *Business and Professional Communication Quarterly*, 79(4), 442-463. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2329490616657635>
- [12] Companies Registry. (2024). Registered Non-Hong Kong Companies. <https://www.cr.gov.hk/en/publication/fact-stat/statistics/registered-non-hk-companies.htm>
- [13] Cooper, L., Orrell, J., & Bowden, M. (2010). *Work integrated learning : a guide to effective practice* (1st ed.). Routledge.
- [14] Di Pietro, G. (2022). International internships and skill development: A systematic review. *Review of Education*, 10(2), e3363. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1002/rev3.3363>
- [15] DuPre, C., & Williams, K. (2011). Undergraduates' Perceptions of Employer Expectations. *Journal of Career and Technical Education*, 26, 8-19. <https://doi.org/10.21061/jcte.v26i1.490>
- [16] Edmonds, D. M., Zayts-Spence, O., Fortune, Z., & Fung, J. S. Y. (2023). Graduates' perceptions and employers' expectations: Essential skills in Hong Kong workplaces during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond. *Industry and Higher Education*, 38(4), 385-395. <https://doi.org/10.1177/09504222231224087>
- [17] EF Education. (2024). EF English Proficiency Index - Hong Kong. <https://www.ef.edu/eipi/regions/asia/hong-kong/>
- [18] Ehlers, U. (2020). *Future Skills - The Future of Learning and Higher Education*.
- [19] Evans, S. (2010). Business as usual: The use of English in the professional world in Hong Kong. *English for Specific Purposes*, 29(3), 153-167. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.esp.2009.11.005>
- [20] Ferns, S., Campbell, M., & Zegwaard, K. (2014). *Work Integrated Learning*. In (pp. 1-6).
- [21] Finley, A. P. (2023). *The Career-Ready Graduate: What Employers Say about the Difference College Makes*. American Association of Colleges and Universities.
- [22] Gibbons, R., & Grant, G. (1980). On Competence: A Critical Analysis of Competence-Based Reforms in Higher Education. *The Journal of higher education (Columbus)*, 51(6), 695. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1981175>
- [23] Hrastinski, S. (2019). What Do We Mean by Blended Learning? *TechTrends*, 63(5), 564-569. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11528-019-00375-5>
- [24] KPMG. (2025). Hong Kong Employment Outlook 2025. <https://kpmg.com/cn/en/home/insights/2025/03/hong-kong-employment-outlook-2025.html>
- [25] Li, Y.-T. (2021). How important is English, Mandarin, and Cantonese for getting a job? Exploring employers' perceptions of linguistic capital in Hong Kong. *Chinese Sociological Review*, 54(2), 155-177. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21620555.2021.1964948>
- [26] Matsouka, K., & Mihail, D. M. (2016). Graduates' employability: What do graduates and employers think? *Industry & higher education*, 30(5), 321-326. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0950422216663719>
- [27] Mulder, M. (2012). Competence-based Education and Training. *The Journal of Agricultural Education and Extension*, 18. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1389224X.2012.670048>
- [28] O'Loughlin, K. (2011). The Interpretation and Use of Proficiency Test Scores in University Selection: How Valid and Ethical Are They? *Language Assessment Quarterly*, 8, 146-160. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15434303.2011.564698>
- [29] Oneri Uzun, G. (2021). A Review of Communication, Body Language and Communication Conflict.
- [30] Qing, X. (2016). English Language Training in the Workplace. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-30157-0>
- [31] Randstad. (2024). Hong Kong SAR's job outlook and salary trends 2024. <https://www.randstad.com.hk/hr-trends/workforce-trends/hong-kong-job-market-outlook-salary-trends-2024/>
- [32] Rido, A. (2019). English for University Graduate Employability: Students and Employers' Voices. 12th Conference on Applied Linguistics (CONAPLIN 2019),
- [33] Roshid, M. M., & Kankaanranta, A. (2025). English Communication Skills in International Business: Industry Expectations Versus University Preparation. *Business and Professional Communication Quarterly*, 88(1), 100-125. <https://doi.org/10.1177/23294906231184814>

- [34] Shepard, C., & Rose, H. (2023). English medium higher education in Hong Kong: linguistic challenges of local and non-local students. *Language and Education*, 37(6), 788-805. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09500782.2023.2240571>
- [35] Singh, G. G. K., & Singh, G. S. K. (2008). Malaysian graduates' employability skills. *Unitar E-Journal*, 4(1).
- [36] Spolsky, B. (1989). Communicative Competence, Language Proficiency, and Beyond. *Applied Linguistics*, 10(2), 138-156. <https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/10.2.138>
- [37] Schorr, I., Plecher, D.A., Eichhorn, C. & Klinker, G. (2024). Foreign language learning using augmented reality environments: A systematic review. *Frontiers in Virtual Reality*, 5:1288824. Doi: 10.3389/frvir.2024.1288824
- [38] Sylvia, S. W. (2024). Feasibility of Blended Learning Adoption in a Hong Kong Tertiary English Environment: a Study of Students' Learning Gain and Experiences. *Iris Journal of Educational Research*, 4(3). <https://doi.org/10.33552/ijer.2024.04.000587>
- [39] Thomas, A., Piquette, C., & McMaster, D. (2016). English communication skills for employability: the perspectives of employers in Bahrain. *Learning and Teaching in Higher Education: Gulf Perspectives*, 13(1), 36-52. <https://doi.org/10.18538/lthe.v13.n1.227>
- [40] Ting, S.-H., Marzuki, E., Chuah, K.-M., Misieng, J., & Jerome, C. (2017). Employers' Views on Importance of English Proficiency and Communication Skill for Employability in Malaysia. *Indonesian Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 7(2). <https://doi.org/10.17509/ijal.v7i2.8132>
- [41] Tomlinson, M. (2017). Forms of graduate capital and their relationship to graduate employability. *Education + Training*, 59(4), 338-352. <https://doi.org/10.1108/ET-05-2016-0090>
- [42] University Grants Committee Secretariat. (2025). Student Enrolment of UGC-funded Programmes by University, Level of Study, Place of Origin and Mode of Study. <https://portal.csd.gov.hk/geoportal/#metadataInfoPanel>
- [43] Vorwerk, C. (2015). Communicative Competence: Linguistic Aspects. In J. D. Wright (Ed.), *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences* (Second Edition) (pp. 294-301). Elsevier. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-08-097086-8.53042-6>
- [44] Wesselink, R. (2010). Comprehensive competence-based vocational education: the development and use of a curriculum analysis and improvement model. *Irrigation and Drainage - IRRIG DRAIN*.
- [45] Wong, M., & Wong, K. (2024). Navigating graduate employability and job market expectations in Hong Kong amidst and beyond the global pandemic. *Journal of Education and Work*, 37(1-4), 253-276. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13639080.2024.2362636>
- [46] Yamao, S., & Sekiguchi, T. (2015). Employee commitment to corporate globalization: The role of English language proficiency and human resource practices. *Journal of World Business*, 50(1), 168-179.
- [47] Zainuddin, S. Z. B., Pillai, S., Dumanig, F. P., & Phillip, A. (2019). English language and graduate employability. *Education + Training*, 61(1), 79-93. <https://doi.org/10.1108/et-06-2017-0089>
- [48] Zhou, Y., Zhu, R., & Zheng, X. (2020). Second language skills and labor market outcomes: Evidence from the handover of Hong Kong. *China Economic Review*, 59, 101366. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chieco.2019.101366>