

# English for Career Readiness



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The International Research Foundation  
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# TIRF Insights

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"TIRF Insights" profiles recent research in the field of English Language Teaching (ELT) in a practical and accessible format. Our publication is written for parents, teachers, school leaders, and all student advocates who want to review recent educational trends in a nonacademic way. This paper on English for Career Readiness is available in English, Arabic, Chinese, and Spanish.

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### About the author

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# What are the key issues?

## What role does English play in the global workplace?

There is no question that the English language is an essential tool for international communication in today's globalized workplace. Of the 2.3 billion English speakers around the world, 1.85 billion speak English as a second language, in comparison to the 380–450 million for whom it is a first language (Crystal, 2019), making English the predominant lingua franca globally. Most of today's English learners are not learning the language to assimilate into English-speaking countries such as the UK or the US, but rather to be able to communicate with those who do not share their first language, either in their own country or while working or studying abroad. Scientists and academics share their research and knowledge through English, pilots land planes in English, and businesspeople use English in teams consisting of people from around the world. For good or for bad, the ability to communicate internationally in English is often an essential requirement for gaining opportunities for career advancement and improved socio-economic status. If learners are to communicate in English effectively with people from different parts of the world and backgrounds, they will need to be equipped with soft skills alongside language proficiency.

In this paper, we will look at the specific soft skills needed for the future workplace, and why they are important, particularly in today's world. We will discuss how these skills can be easily incorporated into the English language classroom and explore strategies we can use to help learners develop them.

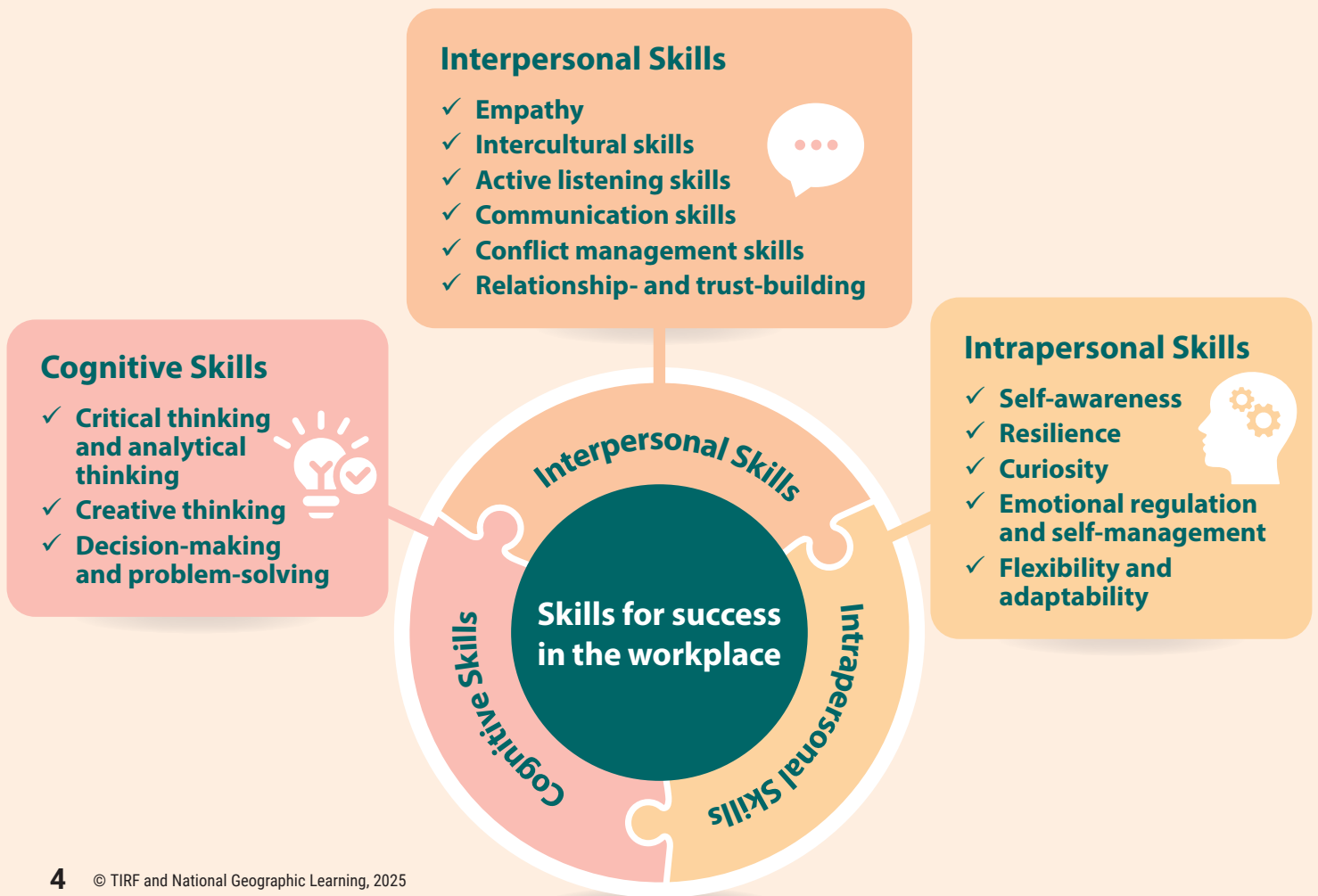
## What soft skills are required to communicate effectively in the work environment?

An *Economist* magazine survey of more than 500 organizations found that communication breakdowns are largely due not to language issues but to differences in culture and behavioral norms (Economist Impact, 2012). This means that, to achieve their communicative goals—whether that be to build relationships, to collaborate effectively, or to share information—users of English need to also improve their competencies in soft skills.

Terms like soft skills, employability skills, transferable skills, life skills, future-ready skills, and 21<sup>st</sup>-century skills are used almost interchangeably to describe the key competencies needed to participate appropriately in an increasingly diverse society and to cope with rapidly changing workplaces (Scott, 2015). The World Health Organization (WHO) (2003) defines life skills as ones that help people make informed decisions, solve problems, think critically and creatively, communicate effectively, build healthy relationships, and empathize with others. Some academics (Gates et al., 2016 as cited in Joynes, Rossignoli, & Amonoo-Kuofi, 2019) define soft skills as those that enable people to effectively navigate their environment, relate well with others, perform well, and achieve their goals.

Despite the difference in terms, the core skills identified by institutions such as the World Economic Forum (WEF) (2025), McKinsey & Company (Dondi, Klier, Panier, & Schubert, 2021), UNICEF (2022), and the United Nations (2015), and described in an analysis of several key studies (Joynes et al., 2019), can be grouped into three categories: cognitive skills, interpersonal skills, and intrapersonal skills. Some of the skills shown in Figure 1, such as critical thinking, self-awareness, and emotional regulation, have already been integrated into modern ELT material in the last 10 to 15 years. Others, however, such as the interpersonal skills, have not yet found their way into many of our existing resources.

**Figure 1** Core soft skills for success in the workplace



Students visiting a workplace and learning about working life, Colombia →



## Why are these skills important for the workplace?

Owing to the rise in automation in the workplace, the proliferation of information we need to process, and the acceleration of change—partly due to technology—we are faced with new and complex problems, choices, and situations that require us to go beyond mindless thinking and rote-learned behavior and employ the cognitive skills of critical thinking, analytical thinking, and creative thinking. It is no longer sufficient to simply comprehend and memorize information; our learners need to be able to analyze, evaluate, and infer, while also collaborating with others to make decisions, innovate, and find solutions. It is therefore no surprise that, according to the *World Economic Forum Future of Jobs Report* (WEF, 2025), analytical thinking is ranked as the most sought-after skill among employers, while skills such as dexterity, endurance, and precision are predicted to become less important.

Among the jobs that are predicted to see the largest growth in the period 2030 to 2050 are those of salespersons, nursing professionals, and teachers, according to a survey of over 1,000 leading global employers (WEF, 2025), while jobs such as data entry, secretarial, and clerical jobs are likely to see a substantial decline in numbers.

More and more of our English language learners will be doing jobs that require them to interact and collaborate with others and, to do so successfully, they need interpersonal skills—skills that enable them to nurture relationships, listen attentively, and deal with people who might have communication styles, norms, and viewpoints that conflict with their own. To achieve effective communication and workplace success, learners need to be able to manage these differences, empathize, and build trust in their relationships. In his book *The Speed of Trust*, Covey (2008) demonstrates the clear link between trust and communication, stating that:

*“In a high-trust relationship, you can say the wrong thing, and people will still get your meaning. In a low-trust relationship, you can be very measured, even precise, and they’ll still misinterpret you”* (p. 6).

To successfully build relationships with others, learners first need intrapersonal skills—the skills of self-awareness (understanding their own norms, expectations, and emotional reactions to unfamiliar behaviors and communication styles), self-management (the ability to manage their responses to challenging situations), adaptability, and curiosity. People who can be adaptable and flexible are more likely to adjust their ways of communicating and behaving at work to accommodate others; people who are curious are more likely to listen actively, be more adaptable, and build more intimate relationships (Kashdan & Roberts, 2004; Kashdan et al., 2010, 2013).

In the next section, we will further explore how changes in today's world impact the skills learners need.

## What do we know?

### How are these skills connected to English language education?

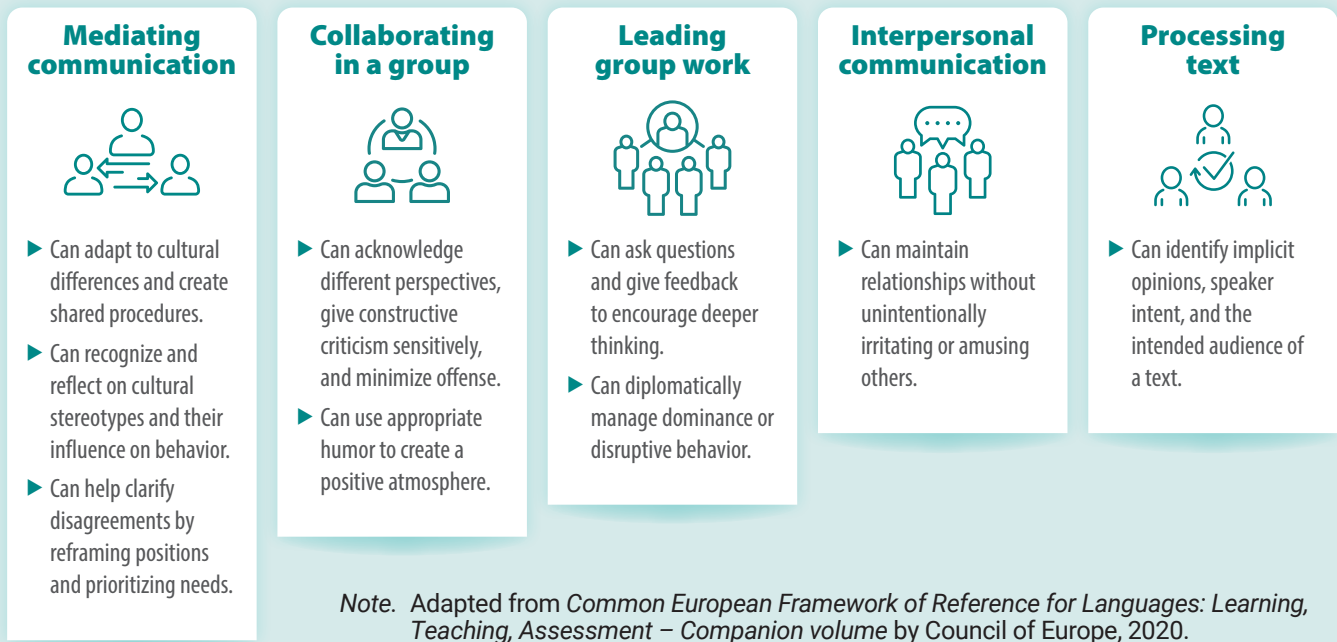
In the 1960s, Hymes (1972) put forward the concept of communicative competence, suggesting that being able to communicate effectively involves going beyond knowing the rules of grammar and vocabulary and producing well-formed sentences; it requires the ability to factor in contextual and sociocultural influences that affect language use. The definition of communicative competence was later expanded by Canale and Swain (1980) to encompass these four areas:

- ▶ *linguistic competence* (knowledge of the language rules and ability to put sentences together accurately);
- ▶ *sociolinguistic competence* (knowledge of what is appropriate or inappropriate depending on the context, and ability to use language according to the sociocultural rules of that context);
- ▶ *discourse competence* (knowledge of appropriate language use according to genre and ability to participate in interactions); and
- ▶ *strategic competence* (knowledge and usage of strategies that can improve communication).

In other words, for learners to be able to effectively communicate in English, they need to understand the context of the sociocultural rules of the interaction, as well as the ability to achieve their communicative goals—whether transactional (to share information) or interpersonal (to build relationships).

More recently, to better reflect how language is used in real-life interactions, the Council of Europe has published additional descriptors to highlight the skills needed for interaction, and introduced descriptors for mediation, in their companion volume

**Figure 2** Adapted CEFR descriptors demonstrating soft-skill competencies



to the Common Framework for References for Languages (CEFR, Council of Europe, 2020). The decision to include these descriptors highlights the range of soft skills needed for effective communication, and that the criteria for English competency go beyond accurate grammar and vocabulary.

## How do the changes in today's world impact the skills we need?

There is no doubt that exponential advancements in technology are changing the way we interact with the world around us and, therefore, the skills we need to prioritize to be career-ready. Let us consider some of these changes:

- Learners, even those with a limited English ability, can now retrieve and share information in English with ease. Advanced translation technology and artificial intelligence is readily available to anyone with access to the internet, enabling people to understand websites written in English, and to share information via emails and reports effortlessly. However, while technology can enable transactional communication, it is, as yet, unable to substitute the skills needed for interpersonal communication, e.g., interpreting one another's intentions, spotting misunderstandings, managing conflict.
- The increased usage of mobile devices has also changed the way we interact with one another. Author of *7 Skills for the Future* Prince (2019) suggests that the time young people traditionally spent learning interaction skills, through observing adults and experimenting with those skills in face-to-face interactions with their peers, has now been replaced with time spent staring at screens. In addition, social media tends to encourage monologuing and personal broadcasting, with

a focus on sharing our personal experiences, feelings, and opinions, rather than having extended dialogs where we actively listen to people with thoughts and perspectives different than our own (Leetaru, 2019). As a result, interaction skills and relationship-building skills need to be actively cultivated in our young people wherever possible.

- The overwhelming amount of information available to us online calls for us to sift through information at speed and tends to result in our developing a bias toward opinions and viewpoints that agree with our own, and risks us reaching hasty conclusions without questioning the sources or their intent. In developing learners' cognitive skills, educators need to encourage them to explore, search for reliable evidence, and understand the complexities of different perspectives.
- The world of work is rapidly changing. New jobs are constantly being created. The *WEF's Future of Jobs Report 2025* indicates that, by 2030, 22% of today's jobs will undergo changes caused by new jobs being created and old jobs being displaced. The report suggests that workers must balance hard and soft skills to thrive in today's work environments, with employers expecting 39% of workers' core skills to change by 2030 (WEF, 2025). The transferable nature of soft skills means that they can be applied to a variety of roles in the workplace. The OECD's (2019) *Future of Education and Skills 2030* project report suggests that social skills and emotional skills such as empathy, self-awareness, and communication skills are becoming essential, as workplaces become more diverse, stating that "Workers whose jobs require social and emotional skills are unlikely to be replaced by technology" (p.91).
- It is becoming common to work remotely on projects with team members in different locations. The resulting lack of opportunities to meet face-to-face means that more and more global teams can find it hard to collaborate, build relationships, and manage conflict.
- The proliferation of multinational corporations and increased international collaborations means that more and more teams are now made up of people from diverse cultural backgrounds. Understanding the impact of culture in diverse teams (not only national cultures but also the cultures of people from different

Young people using their mobile devices ↓



communities, age, and social groups) is therefore important, as it has the greatest potential to cause problems in interactions (DiStefano & Maznevski, 2000). For example, there may be differing views on how appropriate it is to interrupt, how much personal information we share when building relationships in the workplace, how we speak to our senior managers, how we manage time, etc. (Chong, 2018) and different expectations can lead to conflict. However, diverse teams that recognize, appreciate, and cultivate the differences each team member brings can generate an enormous wealth of material to innovate and tackle complex challenges (DiStefano & Maznevski, 2000).

Skills that enable better collaboration, relationship-building, and intercultural understanding are increasingly in demand, and are crucial to ensuring our learners become better communicators in today's global workforce. In preparing our learners to communicate in English in the real world, we need to consider how we are evolving our approach to align with these changes.

## What are the implications?

The undeniable importance of transferable soft skills means that English language educators need to incorporate them into their curriculum. However, integrating such concepts does not have to be separate from the teaching and learning of English. In fact, language education is in a prime position to help support the development of these skills for several reasons.

- Developing language competence is about learning to communicate effectively in the language. Effective communication requires the ability to navigate conversations, even with a low level of English; to read between the lines of what is said; appreciate different perspectives; understand differences in sociocultural rules and contexts (e.g., how far we stand from each other; when self-promotion is seen as confidence and when it is seen as arrogance, etc.), and manage differences and disagreements.
- English language practice naturally lends itself to speaking and discussing in groups and pairs, thus providing opportunities to practice social interaction and collaboration skills.
- Soft skills can easily become the topic of a class, through the use of materials that explore, for example, intercultural experiences or critical-thinking errors, thus allowing learners to read, listen to, and discuss these subjects in the same way that they might read an article about the pyramids in Egypt or listen to a dialog about Carnival in Brazil. Teachers do not need to be an expert on soft skills to do this, any more than we need to be an expert on the pyramids or Carnival, but instead, can simply exploit these topics as interesting contexts for language use.
- Classes that have students from diverse backgrounds (from different regions, socio-economic backgrounds, age groups, as well as countries) have the added

Students interacting and collaborating via a speaking activity, South Africa →



benefit of exposing students to different norms, expectations, and attitudes. We can take advantage of the broad range of perspectives in any class to find opportunities for developing self-awareness, curiosity, empathy, and intercultural skills.

We will now look at how those in direct contact with the learners can help in the development of these essential skills that prepare them for the workplace.

## How can we support learners' development of soft skills?

### Strategies for English language teachers

While English-teaching professionals sometimes express feelings of insecurity about their level of knowledge of soft skills, it is important to realize that these are skills that we may well already possess: the ability to build rapport with students, elicit ideas, and oil the wheels of communication; the curiosity and critical-thinking skills to explore and find out more about unfamiliar topics; and the ability to manage disagreement and conflict, and embrace diversity in a classroom. Let's look at some ways teachers can help learners develop these skills as part of language lessons:

- **Make use of pair and group work when providing opportunities to practice speaking.** Allow for meaningful discussions, where students can actively listen to one another's points of view and collaborate to solve problems. By assigning students with roles, such as the ones suggested in De Bono's (n.d.) *Six Thinking Hats*, we can cultivate cognitive skills as well as collaboration skills.
- **Encourage learners to reflect on their emotions and reactions.** Self-awareness is the foundation of many of these soft skills: An awareness of their own emotions enables students to regulate themselves and respond in a way that achieves their communicative goals, while an awareness of their norms and our expectations can help them understand their reactions to behaviors and attitudes that are different from their own. One simple way we can encourage self-awareness is to start or end our lessons by asking students how they feel and why they feel this way.

- **Use the Critical Incident (CI) technique.** Originally used in the field of psychology (Flanagan, 1954), the CI technique involves a discussion about a problematic situation (the critical incident) such as a misunderstanding between two people. Today, the CI technique is widely used in intercultural skills training to encourage participants to view a situation from different perspectives. Critical incidents usually feature a miscommunication or a misunderstanding but do not contain the reasons for the behaviors. Learners are encouraged to "put themselves in the shoes" of the different characters involved and work in pairs/groups to consider different interpretations of the situation, possible reasons for why the problem happened, and what they would do to resolve or avoid such an issue from happening. We can make use of published critical incidents as reading/listening and speaking activities. Alternatively, we can write our own, based on our personal experiences and/or encourage students to share their own critical incidents.
- **Facilitate learning with an inquiry-based approach.** With so much information accessible online, the role of the teacher is shifting from that of a knowledge giver to a facilitator. When students ask questions in class—whether they are about how a grammar structure is used or how the pyramids were constructed—rather than immediately offering an answer, teachers can urge students to formulate their own

A lesson on developing the intercultural skill of dealing with uncertainty avoidance in seven steps, using critical incidents from the *Voices* program (National Geographic Learning) ↓

### Critical incidents

## 1 Self-reflection task

### 4D Dealing with uncertainty

#### SPEAKING

- 1 Work in pairs. Answer the questions and say how you felt.
  - a You gave them a general idea of what to do.
  - b You gave them step-by-step instructions.
  - c You asked them to repeat the instructions back to you.
  - d You watched and corrected them while they did the task.
- 2 Think about the last time you met up with a group of friends. How much did you know about the plan beforehand?
  - a I knew exactly where we were going and what we were going to do.
  - b I knew what we wanted to do and where we wanted to go but not in much detail.
  - c I knew what we wanted to do, but we didn't really make a plan.
  - d What plan?

#### 2 Read the story about Carolina and answer questions 1–4.

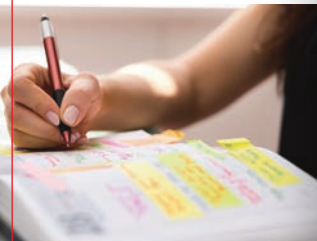
Carolina likes routines and likes to plan everything carefully in advance. Every Tuesday, she spends the evening at her parents' house. Every Thursday, she meets her friends for coffee and every Friday, she stays at home and makes pizza. Having some control over what's going to happen makes her feel safe. Then one day, Carolina meets Akos. Akos never plans things in advance, is always late and prefers to be flexible. He likes to make decisions based on how he's feeling that day and thinks that eating pizza every Friday is limiting his freedom. When Carolina tries to make plans to meet for coffee in advance, Akos sounds interested, but he never gives her definite answers. His behaviour really annoys Carolina.

- 1 The word *uncertainty* refers to a feeling of not knowing for sure what's going to happen. Who do you think prefers to avoid uncertainty? Carolina or Akos?
- 2 Who do you relate more to? Carolina or Akos?
- 3 What do you think Carolina might say about Akos?
- 4 What do you think Akos might say about Carolina?

- 3 Work in pairs. Decide if these statements are made by someone who prefers to avoid uncertainty (A) or someone who doesn't mind uncertainty (DM).
  - 1 'I feel uncomfortable with new things and unknown situations.'
  - 2 'I don't know the future and I can't control it. And that's OK.'
  - 3 'Situations change, so I prefer to make decisions as things happen.'
  - 4 'We should stick to what we know works well.'

#### MY VOICE

- 4 Watch the video about avoiding uncertainty. Work in pairs. What does the video say about these topics?
  - 1 People who avoid uncertainty and routines
  - 2 People who don't mind uncertainty and the future
  - 3 How people who avoid uncertainty might feel about people who don't mind uncertainty
  - 4 How people who don't mind uncertainty might feel about people who avoid uncertainty



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## 2 Read and reflect on a critical incident

## 3 Listen to an expert

## 4 Focus on the target skill

## 5 Apply target skill to more critical incidents

**1** You go to your favourite restaurant one evening with your best friend Ana and she is shocked to see that they have changed their menu. She can't find any dishes she's familiar with and she suggests going to a different restaurant. You get annoyed with her for being inflexible.

**2** You have an important exam in two weeks and according to the study timetable you've written, you have to study four chapters of the book today. Your friend Zoltán calls you to watch a film with him at the cinema; the film is only showing for two more days. You tell him about your study plan, but Zoltán says you need to relax and stop stressing about the exam.

**3** Your mother drives for 40 minutes to go to the supermarket twice a week. You're trying to persuade her to shop for groceries online because it would be more convenient and would save her time. Your mother has never shopped online before. She thinks that online shopping is risky and she isn't keen.

**5** Look at the Communication skill box. In pairs, think about Carolina's story in Exercise 2. What advice could you give Carolina? What advice could you give Akos?

#### COMMUNICATION SKILL Dealing with uncertainty

The people you meet might respond differently to uncertainty from you. Consider seeing things from their point of view and adapting a little. With people who don't mind uncertainty, ...

- remember you can learn a lot from the unknown and the unfamiliar.
- allow for flexibility.
- show you understand the importance of action and change.

With people who avoid uncertainty, ...

- offer details when making decisions.
- provide a context with background information.
- show you understand the importance of structure and plans.

#### SPEAKING

**6 OWN IT!** Work in pairs. Who prefers to avoid uncertainty more in situations 1–3 above? What would you do in each of the situations? *I'd say to Ana that it might be interesting to try one of the new dishes ...*

#### EXPLORE MORE!

Is our preference for avoiding uncertainty connected to our culture? Search online for 'culture + uncertainty avoidance'.

**7** Look at the Useful language box. Which of these phrases can you use when dealing with someone who avoids uncertainty? Which of them can you use when dealing with someone who doesn't mind uncertainty?

#### Useful language Adapting to different ways of dealing with uncertainty

**Showing flexibility**  
For me, either way is fine.  
Let me know what you're comfortable with.

**Providing context**  
The reason I do it this way is ...  
Let me explain why (I'm doing this).

**Showing that you understand the importance of something**  
I understand that (structure/flexibility) is important / means a lot to you.  
I can see why you (spend time on planning).

**8** Work in pairs. Replay the situations in Exercise 6. Take turns to be the person who avoids uncertainty and together, decide what you're going to do. Use the Communication skill box and the Useful language to help you.

**9** Work in small groups. Discuss the questions. 1 How much do you avoid uncertainty? On the line below, mark where you think you normally are and say why. 2 Do you know someone who has a very different response to uncertainty from you?



## 6 Useful language

## 7 Personalized speaking task

hypotheses, find their own answers, evaluate what they find, and draw their own conclusions. We can also encourage curiosity by asking learners questions that provoke deeper thinking about a topic.

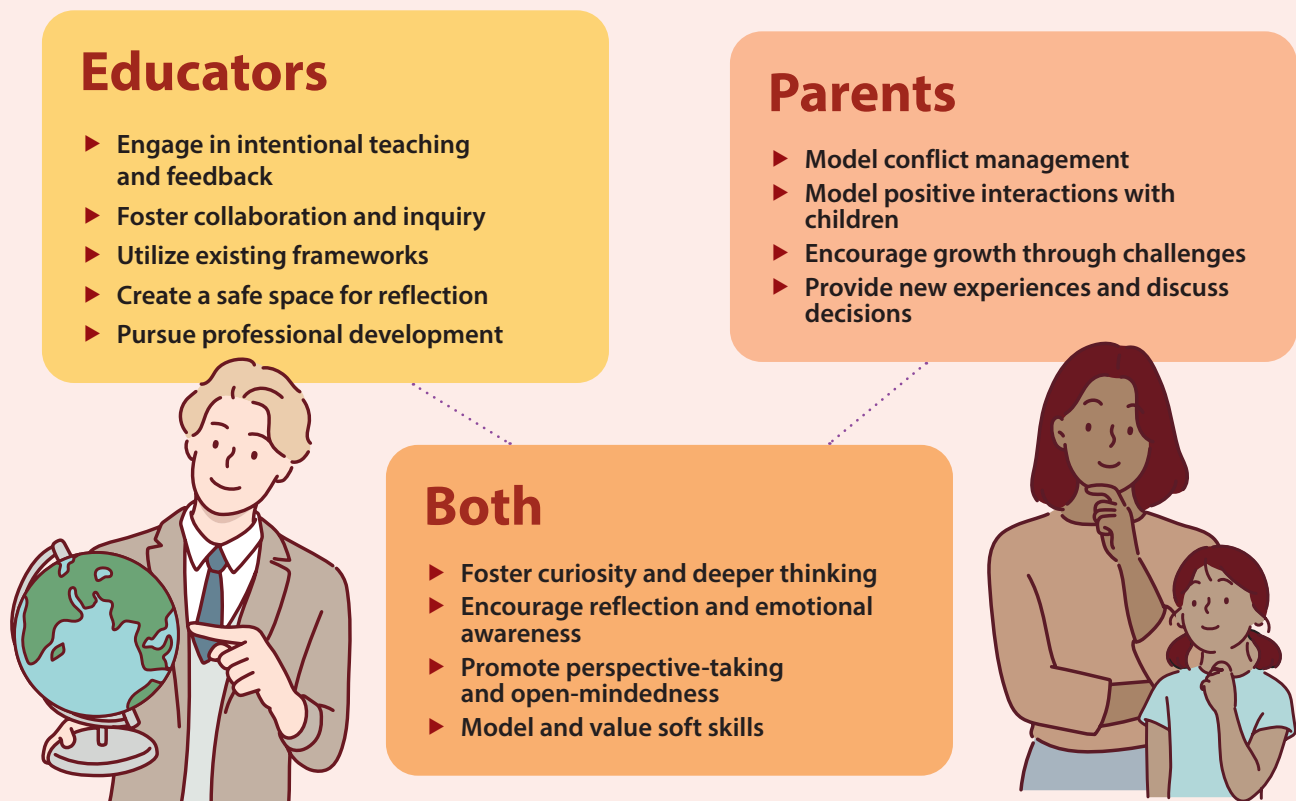
- **Give students extended group tasks.** When working in groups on a project, students get to actively collaborate, apply critical-thinking skills to navigate information, negotiate meaning, manage diverse perspectives, and agree on solutions to problems together. When evaluating student projects, teachers can use assessment rubrics that also evaluate how well they have collaborated and incorporate that into the evaluation criteria.
- **Encourage openness.** By creating a safe space, we allow students to openly explore their thoughts and emotions, thereby developing their intrapersonal and interpersonal skills.
- **Provide feedback on use of soft skills.** Teachers often provide feedback (on-the-spot or delayed) on their learners' language use. Consider also providing feedback on learners' use of soft skills, e.g., acknowledging and praising students when they use active listening strategies, elicit opinions from their group mates, attempting to see things from each other's point of view, or manage disagreements in an appropriate way.
- **Understand that skills require conscious practice with guidance.** In the same way that we do not learn to drive simply by reading a book about driving but by practicing with an instructor to guide us and provide strategies for how we can improve, developing soft skills requires active use of those skills. We can leverage resources available for guidance and reflection: More and more ELT courses and materials now incorporate easy-to-follow tasks for the development of critical-thinking skills such as socioemotional skills; step-by-step guidance for developing interpersonal skills such as intercultural skills, relationship-building skills, and active listening skills are also finding their way into General English course series like *Voices* (National Geographic Learning). We can also look outside ELT for existing models, frameworks, and resources (see section on additional resources).
- **Make use of existing frameworks when designing courses.** While many English language educators might have heard of the concepts of relationship building, intercultural communication, critical thinking, etc., the subskills that make up these skills and the steps to developing them are often less familiar. Moreover, many of these soft skills are not often seen as ones that can be developed, but as innate abilities, e.g., you are either good at talking to people or you're not; curious people are born curious; and some people are just bad at confronting conflict. By referring to frameworks like the interaction and mediation descriptors provided by the CEFR or the assessment criteria for the OECD PISA Global Competence framework (2018), we can consider how to systematically incorporate these soft skills into our curricula and lesson plans.

- **Invest in professional development.** Perhaps the best way for educators to develop these skills is to seek professional development and increase their. In the world of ELT, there are courses in the Business English sector that train teachers to incorporate interpersonal and intercultural skills training into their lessons. Education managers also need to recognize the role of the English language classroom and the English teacher in developing students' soft skills, and invest in professionally developing their English teachers by sending them on training courses, stocking their staff library with books relevant to specific soft skills, and providing teachers with opportunities to share what they have learned on these topics.

## Guidance for parents

Parents of young learners can also support the development of these skills in the way they interact with their children, even without the structure of the classroom, specific pedagogical training, or knowledge of English. They can foster curiosity by welcoming questions and guiding children to speculate on possible answers; they can promote open-mindedness and tolerance of people who are different from themselves; and they can encourage their children to understand that their norms and opinions might not be shared by everyone.

**Figure 3** How educators and parents can incorporate soft-skill development



Children look to their parents as role models and often imitate what they see and hear. Therefore, by modeling good interpersonal skills, for example by being an active listener in conversations with them, parents can help show them positive ways of interacting with others. While familiar routines and experiences are important and comforting for young children, it is also important to offer new experiences and encourage children to embrace challenges and uncertainties so as to foster flexibility, adaptability, and resilience.

It is valuable to see how many of the roles of teachers and parents overlap, and to appreciate their shared responsibilities in supporting the development of these skills. Learners who are given the opportunity to focus on them both inside and outside of the classroom are more likely to be able to implement them when the need arises in their future workplace.

## What's on the horizon?

Many governments and policymakers understand the importance of soft skills in the ever-changing labor market and are implementing curricula and revised models of education that focus on teamwork and soft-skill development (Jezard, 2017). The OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) developed a global competence assessment framework in 2018 (OECD, 2018). The framework stated that effective communication and appropriate behavior within diverse teams were keys to success in many jobs and urged all schools to educate their young people to be globally competent in order to boost their employability and prepare them to become citizens of the world. Countries like Vietnam are placing increasing emphasis on integrating soft-skills training into their curriculum, recognizing there are gaps between the skills that businesses and employers require and those that young graduates and employees typically possess (UNICEF, 2020). Among these skills are critical thinking, problem solving, creativity, teamwork, self-regulation, and interpersonal skills (UNICEF, 2020; World Bank, 2014).

The world of ELT is also recognizing this shift toward incorporating soft-skill development. A look at the 2024 British Council ELTons awards finalists reveals an overwhelming number of entries that integrate self-awareness, empathy, self-management, intercultural skills, interpersonal skills, and critical thinking into their innovations, giving us a clear indication of where the ELT industry is heading (Chong, 2024). The publisher National Geographic Learning, in its new edition of the ELT course series *Keynote*, features a career skills framework that includes self-management, interpersonal skills, and thinking skills. It is also becoming commonplace in many other ELT course materials to see questions that push students to think critically, tasks that encourage teamwork and collaborative problem-solving, and pedagogy that steers students towards asking questions and finding their own answers. And this trend will only continue to grow.

Students doing a group trust-building exercise, Ukraine →



As more employers prioritize taking on people with ready-to-go soft skills over employees that will need time and money invested in them to develop those skills, it is likely that more governments will look to include soft skills in their national curricula, and more schools will see the development of these skills as an integral part of English language education.

## How can we take action?

For educators who wish to further explore and discuss the topics raised in this paper, these are some questions that could guide your conversations. Parents and organizational leaders can also adapt the questions to promote discussion of soft-skill development at home and in the workplace.

1. How can we actively engage our colleagues and learners to identify the skills that are needed for the workplace?
2. Are we setting clear learning objectives that integrate cognitive, intrapersonal, and interpersonal skills? Are we including them in our evaluation criteria when we assess students both formatively and summatively? Are students aware that they are being assessed on these skills and why they are important?
3. What can we do to develop learners' self-awareness and the ability to manage their own emotions and reactions, to lead to better interpersonal skills?
4. What different cultures and diverse backgrounds exist in our classrooms? How can we make use of the different viewpoints and behavioral norms to encourage learners to see things from new perspectives and embrace diversity?
5. How can we increase the percentage of classroom time our students spend participating in free speaking activities and discussions? How can we help them communicate clearly and appropriately, develop and challenge one another's ideas and opinions, or anticipate and deal effectively with possible misunderstandings, communication issues, and emotional reactions?
6. What type of professional development would help us feel more confident and competent at developing the skills that will help our learners achieve success in the workplace? How can we share what we learn with our colleagues or fellow stakeholders?

# Where can we find additional resources?

There is a range of resources within the field of ELT that can help us learn more about the topic, including:

- Professional development books like Dummett and Hughes, (2019) *Critical Thinking in ELT: A Working Model for the Classroom*.
- Blogposts and lessons about teaching soft skills, such as: <https://infocus.eltngl.com/2024/04/16/five-tips-for-developing-students-communication-and-intercultural-skills/>
- Webinars about teaching soft skills, such as: <https://webinars.eltngl.com/5-octoberenglish-for-global-communication-applying-mediation-skills-in-english-for-a-culturally-rich-world/>
- Courses such as this British Council online course: <https://www.futurelearn.com/courses/communicating-across-cultures> or the York Associates Core24 courses that look at the core skills needed for the 21st-century workplace: <https://york-associates.co.uk/core24/>

For professional development, we can also look outside ELT. There are many useful talks, e.g., TED Talks that cover the different soft skills. Try searching with keywords like “active listening” or “building trust.” A recommended reading list includes:

- *7 Skills for the Future* (Prince, 2019)
- *Global Fitness for Global People* (Spencer-Oatey, Franklin, & Lazidou, 2022)
- *Forging Bonds in a Global Workforce* (Molinsky & Hahn, 2024)
- *Successful International Communication* (Chong, 2018)
- *Why You Need Emotional Intelligence to Succeed* (Bradberry, 2015)
- *Time to Think: Listening to Ignite the Human Mind* (Kline, 1999)

For teachers who want practical and easy-to-use tools and resources to utilize in the classroom, there are many frameworks, mnemonics, and models that can be easily implemented via discussion pair/group work. Here are some to start with:

- Project Zero’s Thinking Routines toolbox for providing practice of critical-thinking skills. <https://pz.harvard.edu/thinking-routines>
- Describe-Interpret-Evaluate (DIE) or Describe-Analyze-Evaluate (DAE) model for developing self-awareness of personal and cultural assumptions, and providing practice of withholding judgment and analyzing the complexities of different perspectives when encountering the unfamiliar. See how you can use it here: <https://www.stlhe.ca/teaching-tip-tuesday/june-2022-tip-2-use-the-d-i-e-d-a-e-tool-to-interpret-intercultural-miscommunication/>
- Thomas Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument for providing a model for reflecting on conflict management styles. <https://kilmanndiagnostics.com/about/>

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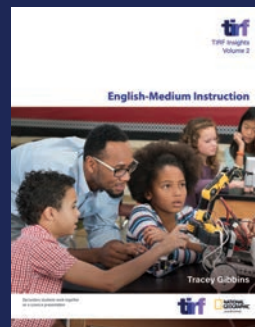
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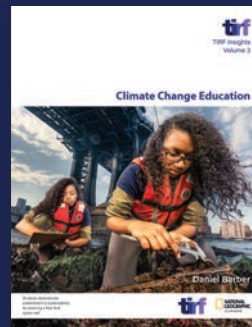
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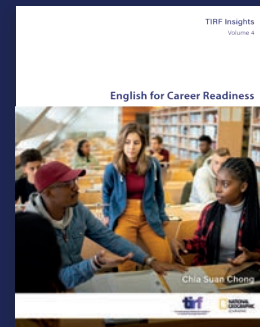
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