

Inna Makhovych

Senior lecturer of the Department of Philology and Translation
Kyiv National University of Technologies and Design (Kyiv)

THE IMPORTANCE OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE AND SOFT SKILLS COMPETENCE FOR FUTURE IT PROFESSIONALS

The development of foreign language competence has become a vital priority in higher education, particularly for students enrolled in non-philological specialties. In an era marked by global integration, technological innovation, and labour market transformation, it is essential that students possess not only technical expertise but also the communicative and intercultural skills necessary to engage across professional and cultural boundaries.

The significance of leveraging technology in education is clearly emphasized in the *OECD Skills Outlook 2019*, which notes that new technologies can improve learning outcomes and facilitate the development of 21st-century skills. These include personalized learning, expanded access to digital resources, and opportunities for lifelong learning both in school and at work. However, the report also highlights that the impact of technology on learner success is mixed, depending greatly on the quality of implementation and the preparedness of both teachers and students. Crucial factors for effective use include ICT competence, time management, and self-motivation (OECD, 2019, p. 64).

In her article “These are the top 10 job skills of tomorrow – and how long it takes to learn them,” published as part of the *Jobs Reset Summit*, K. Whiting identifies ten key skills that are projected to be in high demand in the near future. These include analytical thinking and innovation, active learning, complex problem-solving, critical thinking, creativity, leadership, and resilience. The skills are grouped into four categories: problem-solving, self-management, working with people, and technology use and development. Notably, 50% of workers are expected to require reskilling, and 40% of core job skills are likely to shift within five years (Whiting, 2020).

A European perspective on soft skills in engineering education is offered by M. Caeiro-Rodriguez and colleagues in *Teaching Soft Skills in Engineering Education*. Their findings indicate a growing interest in embedding soft skills into university

curricula, though there remains little consensus on which skills are essential, how to teach them, or how to assess them. The authors point to terminological confusion across different countries and institutions, with varying frameworks such as "21st-century skills," "key competencies," and "transversal skills" complicating cross-system comparisons (Caeiro-Rodriguez et al., 2021, p. 29222).

Caeiro-Rodriguez identifies 18 key characteristics of soft skills for engineering students, including the ability to work in interdisciplinary teams, openness to new experiences, systems thinking, and effective communication. These are organized into five broader categories: technical skills, metacognitive skills, intrapersonal traits, interpersonal abilities, and problem-solving capabilities. Effective pedagogical approaches for cultivating these include project-based learning, competency-based instruction, design thinking, gamification, blended learning, and flipped classrooms (Caeiro-Rodriguez et al., 2021, p. 29226).

The integration of soft skills into English language instruction, particularly in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses, is a central theme in the research conducted by V. Malykhin and colleagues. Their study with IT students shows that problem-solving, teamwork, creativity, self-regulation, and analytical thinking are seen as vital to career readiness. More than 90% of students acknowledged the importance of soft skills, prompting the researchers to propose six strategies for embedding them into ESP instruction: (a) combining competence-based, action-oriented, and blended learning; (b) mixing formal, informal, and non-formal education; (c) encouraging participation in professional online communities; (d) utilizing open educational resources (OER); (e) applying profession-specific learning materials; and (f) adapting activities to students' individual learning styles (Malykhin et al., 2021, p. 257).

In a related study, Malykhin's team explores the development of innovative thinking in IT students. The research finds that 60.12% of students believe innovative thinking is essential for their future careers, while 51.45% consider themselves innovators. Key elements of innovative thinking include creativity (88.44%), information analysis (86.18%), critical thinking (76.30%), open-mindedness (93.06%), and adaptability (71.68%). Interestingly, more than half of respondents believe that such skills can be developed through English language classes. Recommended methods for

fostering innovation include storytelling, mind mapping, associative techniques, and project-based learning (Malykhin et al., 2024, p. 443).

The growing importance of soft skills in the IT labour market is further corroborated by a study from DOU, the Ukrainian IT community. As highlighted by Maria Hurska, employers increasingly prioritize candidates who possess strong soft skills alongside technical competence. Critical skills for junior-level employment include information-seeking and analysis, motivation, teamwork, intermediate or higher English proficiency, communication skills, and time management. Additionally, the ability to receive feedback constructively and prioritize tasks is crucial (Гурська, 2022).

The *InvGate* report on future IT workforce needs reinforces this perspective, identifying adaptability, empathy, collaboration, and continuous learning as top soft skills required for success by 2025. These skills are viewed as essential complements to technical expertise, reflecting the dynamic nature of IT roles and the increasing importance of cross-functional teamwork and client interaction (*11 IT skills in demand for 2025*, 2022).

Taken together, this body of research demonstrates the multifaceted nature of foreign language competence and the need for its development through interdisciplinary and professionally oriented education. Effective language instruction should therefore reflect real-world communication needs, incorporate relevant terminology and genres, and foster cognitive, social, and emotional development.

Central to this endeavour is the adoption of pedagogical strategies that actively engage students and support the holistic development of competencies. Methods such as problem-based learning, flipped classrooms, gamification, and digital collaboration not only enhance language acquisition but also prepare students for the complexities of the modern workplace. Similarly, the use of open educational resources and professional networks can provide learners with exposure to authentic materials and communities of practice, enriching their educational experience and professional identity formation.

Crucially, the effectiveness of such approaches depends on the preparedness of educators and institutions. Teachers must be equipped with both linguistic and methodological expertise, and institutional policies must support innovation, interdisciplinary collaboration, and curriculum integration.

In conclusion, the formation of foreign language competence in students of non-philological specialities is not simply a matter of language instruction. It represents a comprehensive educational objective that intersects with soft skills development, technological literacy, and intercultural awareness. As the demands of the labour market continue to evolve, higher education must respond by designing learning environments that reflect the realities of global professional life. This requires a systemic approach grounded in evidence-based pedagogy, strategic use of technology, and a commitment to student-centred education.

By aligning language education with broader educational reforms and labour market expectations, institutions can ensure that graduates are not only proficient in English or other foreign languages but are also adaptable, collaborative, and innovative professionals capable of thriving in diverse and dynamic environments.

REFERENCES

1. Гурська, М. (2022, 1 лютого). *Технології та софт-скіли, володіння якими IT-компанії очікують від джунів. Великий гайд*. DOU. <https://dou.ua/lenta/projects/hard-and-soft-skills-for-juniors/>
2. *11 IT skills in demand for 2025*. (2022, 27 жовтня). LinkedIn: InvGate. <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/11-skills-demand-2025-invgate/>
3. Caeiro-Rodriguez, M., Manso-Vazquez, M., Mikic-Fonte, F. A., Llamas-Nistal, M., Fernandez-Iglesias, M. J., Tsalapatas, H., Heidmann, O., De Carvalho, C. V., Jesmin, T., Terasmaa, J., & Sorensen, L. T. (2021). Teaching soft skills in engineering education: An European perspective. *IEEE Access*, 9, 29222–29242. <https://doi.org/10.1109/access.2021.3059516>
4. Malykhin, O., Aristova, N., & Dybkova, L. (2024). Organising personalised learning in the English language classroom: Computer engineering and information technology undergraduates perspectives. *ENVIRONMENT. TECHNOLOGIES. RESOURCES. proceedings of the international scientific and practical conference*, 2, 424–427. <https://doi.org/10.17770/etr2024vol2.8092>
5. Malykhin, O., Aristova, N., & Melikova, S. (2021). Soft skills development strategies for computer engineering and information technologies undergraduate students devised in the process of learning English. *ENVIRONMENT. TECHNOLOGIES. RESOURCES. proceedings of the international scientific and practical conference*, 2, 255–260. <https://doi.org/10.17770/etr2021vol2.6602>
6. *OECD Skills Strategy 2019*. (2019). OECD. <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264313835-en>
7. Whiting, K. (2020, 21 жовтня). *These are the top 10 job skills of tomorrow – and how long it takes to learn them*. World Economic Forum. <http://www.weforum.org/stories/2020/10/top-10-work-skills-of-tomorrow-how-long-it-takes-to-learn-them/>