



Staying relevant in the age of AI

Introducing GSE Soft Skills

Mike Mayor | Catherine Doyle

Staying relevant in the age of AI: introducing GSE Soft Skills

Introduction

Almost 40% of the skills being taught today to prepare students for the workplace will be redundant by 2030¹. And the reason? AI.

Yes, there has been a certain amount of hype around the development of generative AI but its impact on society – and in particular the workplace – is undeniable. All of which begs the question: how do we best prepare our students for life outside of the classroom?

Let's be clear. AI is not the enemy of education. It is providing new and innovative ways to learn. We can now engage with digital tutors anytime, anywhere and get personalized feedback². All without the need for a human teacher. But the pace of change in the way we learn is much slower than the step changes taking place in the workplace.

So, how can educators equip students with the skills that **will** be relevant in the future? The answer: soft skills³.

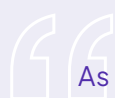


Since the 1990s, education policy has emphasised employability skills like teamwork, leadership, and communication. But for language educators, applying those goals has been difficult. The GSE Soft Skills Framework is the best research to date aimed at aligning those skills with language-learning goals at all levels. I appreciate how the GSE Vocabulary now includes phrases for expressing opinions, disagreement, and other functional expressions. It's a powerful tool for curriculum design, lesson planning, and assessments—one that truly prepares students for the realities of the global workforce.



Bill Bliss

Educator, Author, and Founder of Language & Communication Workshop



As an Academic Director, I've seen how integrating the GSE into our curriculum benefits students. Now, with the GSE Soft Skills Framework, it's even more powerful. Teachers finally have a clear roadmap to teach, assess, and give feedback on soft skills. It's helped us rethink our school reports to include soft skills as essential classroom competencies. This integration prepares learners not just academically but for life—building their confidence to collaborate, lead, and communicate effectively in English and beyond.



Maria Jesús Moreno

Founder and CEO The New Globe School of English

Those truly human skills that AI cannot easily replicate, like creativity, communication and leadership, are the ones employers want the most^{4,5}. And the ones they can't find⁶. The skills gap is currently costing the world's economies billions of dollars in lost revenue⁷.

Almost three times as many people speak English as a second or additional language than those who speak it as a first language. That's over 1 billion speakers. It's no surprise, therefore, that English has become the *lingua franca* of the business world and a key skill in securing better career salaries and greater job satisfaction⁸.

But is mastering English enough to secure a dream role? Possibly. But it's how your students use their English skills that will help them excel in their career.

That's where GSE Soft Skills comes in. Soft Skills in English. The language needed to show creative and collaboration skills, leadership and empathy in an English-speaking workplace.

Soft skills: what the research says

There is no lack of research into the definition of soft skills, their value and how best to learn, teach and assess them⁹.

Key takeaways from this research include:

- Soft skills need to be taught in the same way as any other skill – with clear goals, models to follow, opportunities to practice and feedback on performance
- Soft skills take many years to master and the sooner we start learning about and using them, the better
- Soft skills are most effectively taught within the context of other subjects, rather than as standalone courses

And it's great news for language teachers. The activity types recommended in the research for teaching and assessing soft skills are the ones that you are already familiar with and using in your classes. Activities that involve pair work, group discussion, research.

The language classroom is the ideal place to integrate and practice soft skills.

Soft skills: developing a competency framework

Most of us are not experts in soft skills. With good examples, we might identify proficiency skills, but how do we get our learners to master them?

We first need a definition of the key behaviors at each level of proficiency. The Pearson Employability Skill Development Frameworks do just that. Identifying what someone would demonstrate at each level of proficiency, for each of the soft skills: [Collaboration](#)¹⁰, [Communication](#)¹¹, [Critical Thinking](#)¹², [Leadership](#)¹³ and [Self-Management](#)¹⁴.



Each soft skill is broken down into sub-skills and five levels of proficiency, from Emerging to Mastery (Table 1).

Sub-Skill Engaging with Ideas The set of strategies people use to share, negotiate, and examine claims and ideas, and to reconcile different perspectives, values, opinions, or priorities.					
Pre-Skill Foundations:	●○○○○ Emerging	●●○○○ Basic	●●●○○ Intermediate	●●●●○ Advanced	●●●●● Mastery
Learners need the capacity for verbal communication – communicate ideas, ask and respond to questions.	Listening and Building on Ideas				
	Listens without interrupting or interrupts productively.	Contributes ideas to the group.	Practices active listening in order to understand a speaker's point of view. Responds to and contributes additional / different ideas to the group conversation.	Extends an idea from the group conversation to work towards a shared goal. Elaborates on the ideas of others during a sustained conversation.	Identifies clusters of ideas shared by others in the group. Summarizes multiple ideas to synthesize into a new or improved idea.

Table 1: Collaboration sub-skill: Engaging with Ideas

The Employability Skill Development Frameworks were supplemented by data from Pearson's proprietary database of job roles and functions (Faethm by Pearson) to extend the GSE alignment to those learning English in a workplace setting.



“The GSE Soft Skills Framework is not just a classroom tool, but a bridge between language learning and real-world confidence. Our role is not only to develop language ability, but also to help learners build skills they'll use beyond the classroom. By clearly mapping soft skills and language functions, the framework empowers students to understand what they're learning, why it matters, and how to apply it meaningfully. That clarity supports teachers too—helping them offer relevant lessons, meaningful feedback, and a more purposeful classroom experience for students navigating a globalized world.”

Billie Jago

Educational Writer and Teacher Trainer

Soft skills: developing an English language framework

Once we have an idea of the behaviors expected, we need to think about the language skills needed to demonstrate them.

To identify these language skills, we turn to the Global Scale of English (GSE).



Soft skills have always been the most talked-about but least defined part of language learning. Everyone agrees they matter, but until now, we've lacked a concrete way to teach or measure them. The GSE Soft Skills Framework changes that, giving us clear behaviours tied to real proficiency levels. At Bridge Education Group, we now connect soft skills like leadership to real outcomes—redesigning both adult training and teacher education. The framework helps us personalise learning and make soft skills measurable. We can finally say: this is how feedback sounds at beginner level, or how conflict resolution works as learners gain fluency.



Nelly Segura

Language Education Specialist

The Global Scale of English

The GSE is both a proficiency scale (from 10–90) and a framework of learning objectives describing what a learner can be expected to do at each point on that scale. The GSE proficiency scale is aligned to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) and the framework of GSE Learning Objectives was developed to extend the CEFR Can Do statements to address the needs of audience-specific learners (e.g. Young Learners, Adult Learners, Learners of English for Professional Purposes).

Like the CEFR, the GSE defines language proficiency in terms of the things that a learner “Can Do” in English and supports a skills-based approach to language learning. Unlike the CEFR, which groups learning objectives into broad levels (A1, A2, B1 etc), the GSE Learning Objectives describe what a learner can do at each point on the 10–90 scale. It is this level of detail that enables us to more accurately level content and plan appropriately scaffolded learning pathways.

One other key difference with the CEFR is that the GSE focuses on English only. This has made it possible to develop databases for Vocabulary and Grammar as well.

To find out more about the Global Scale of English, visit the website at:

www.pearson.com/languages/why-pearson/the-global-scale-of-english.html

Aligning soft skills to GSE Learning Objectives

To develop the GSE Soft Skills framework, each behavior in the Employability Skill Development Frameworks and Faethm by Pearson database was aligned to one or more language functions from the GSE Learning Objectives.

Three alignments were carried out for different ages and learner groups:

Learner group	Soft Skills framework	GSE Learning Objectives
Young Learners	Employability Skill Development Frameworks	For Young Learners
Adult Learners	Employability Skill Development Frameworks	For Adults
Workplace Learners	Faethm by Pearson database	For Professional Learners

Table 2: Frameworks used in the alignments for different learner groups



Collaboration

Soft Skills Frameworks	Mastery Level	Behavior	GSE Learning Objectives
Employability Skill Development Framework Engaging with ideas > Engaging in Group Dialogue Around Differing Ideas or Opinions	Basic	Asks others for their opinions.	Young Learners: Can invite others to give their opinions in a classroom discussion. (GSE 46) General Adult Learners: Can give or seek personal views and opinions in discussing topics of interest. (GSE 46)
Faethm by Pearson Framework Communication and Presentation Skills> Chair Meetings	Expert (Mastery)	Chairs complex and high-stakes meetings effectively, setting a positive, inclusive, and productive tone.	Professional Learners: Can follow a fast-paced conversation between fluent speakers well enough to be able to contribute. (GSE 76) Professional Learners: Can participate in extended, detailed professional discussions and meetings with confidence. (GSE 80) Professional Learners: Can adjust tone or language to build rapport in situations where there may be an unequal power dynamic. (GSE 78) Professional Learners: Can confidently take a firm but diplomatic stance over an issue of principle, while showing respect for the viewpoints of others. (GSE 87)

Table 3: Example of behaviors aligned to GSE Learning Objectives

English proficiency level and soft skills

Findings from the alignment study are clear. An increasing level of English language proficiency is needed to demonstrate a growing mastery of each soft skill (Table 4).

	GSE Range for each Soft Skill level				
	1. Emerging	2. Basic	3. Intermediate	4. Advanced	5. Mastery
Collaboration					
Young Learner – School context	23–35	33–46	38–58	56–70	NA
Adult – General context	25–45	39–54	45–65	58–75	65–90
Adult – Workplace context	30–49	48–61	55–69	65–76	71–90
Communication					
Young Learner – School context	22–39	36–48	43–57	54–68	NA
Adult – General context	25–45	35–47	45–61	58–72	70–90
Adult – Workplace context	30–50	44–60	55–70	60–76	71–90
Critical & Creative Thinking					
Young Learner – School context	29–41	37–50	45–57	55–70	NA
Adult – General context	38–50	45–59	55–69	66–75	72–90
Adult – Workplace context	40–55	48–62	55–71	64–76	73–90
Self-Management					
Young Learner – School context	<i>nonlinguistic</i>	22–42	38–56	55–68	NA
Adult – General context	<i>nonlinguistic</i>	25–46	44–61	59–69	64–90
Adult – Workplace context	<i>No data available</i>	<i>No data available</i>	50–69	<i>No data available</i>	<i>No data available</i>
Leadership					
Young Learner – School context	22–37	33–50	40–58	56–70	NA
Adult – General context	30–51	50–60	57–67	64–76	69–90
Adult – Workplace context	32–52	50–61	55–68	66–76	73–90

Table 4: GSE Soft Skill ranges

NB: Mastery level was excluded from the Young Learner alignment. The cognitive development and language level of young learners is unlikely to be sufficient to demonstrate the highest level of proficiency.

Identifying soft skills vocabulary

Our language choices have an impact on others and finding the right words and phrases is key to successfully demonstrating soft skills. GSE Vocabulary¹⁵ has been extended to include useful phraseology for soft skills at different levels of proficiency.

By using the same categories as the Employability Skill Development Frameworks, we’ve made it straightforward to pair language functions with the appropriate vocabulary.

Collaboration

Employability Skill Development Frameworks Sub-skills	Mastery Level	Behavior: GSE Learning Objective	Sample of Soft Skills Vocabulary
Engaging with ideas > Engaging in Group Dialogue Around Differing Ideas or Opinions	Basic (GSE 33–46)	Asks others for their opinions: Can give or seek personal views and opinions in discussing topics of interest. (46)	Would you like to...? Tell me/us more. Tell me what you think (about)... What do you think (of)...? I'd be interested to hear more about... I'm afraid I disagree. That's how I see it too. Do you have any views/thoughts on...? Do you think....?

Table 5: Example of GSE Soft Skills Vocabulary for Adults (Collaboration)





Teaching language today involves deeper purpose. For years, we've talked about soft skills, but few tools helped us implement them in class. The GSE Soft Skills Framework, based on the Global Scale of English, changes that. Now we have a clear and impactful roadmap. It's essential that teacher education includes both, preparing future educators to nurture not only language but also 21st-century skills. We can look forward to empowered learners with stronger communication abilities and a world improved by such innovations.



Belgin Elmas

Professor, Teacher Trainer and Speaker

GSE Soft Skills in action

Soft skills are best taught, practiced and assessed within the context of other subjects, so how can GSE Soft Skills support you in doing this for English?

As a first step, take a look at the Employability Skill Development Frameworks to get a better understanding of behaviors expected at different levels for each of the skills. Look also at Table 3 in this document to check the level of English required for each level of mastery of soft skills. If your class is at a B1 (GSE 43–50) level, for example, you can't expect them to demonstrate the "Mastery" behaviors of Collaboration.

Once you have a better understanding of soft skills behaviors, you can find GSE Soft Skills Learning Objectives and Adult Vocabulary in the GSE Toolkit: [GSE Teacher Toolkit](#)

Teaching Soft Skills in English

Think about the lesson that you are planning to teach. Is there an opportunity to integrate soft skills?

Are you asking students to research a topic? In which case, you may be able to integrate "Evaluating evidence" into the class. Or is there a group discussion activity planned? If so, you have the perfect opportunity to introduce collaboration skills such as "Listening and building on ideas" or "Building consensus".

Whichever soft skill you decide to cover, first introduce it to your students. They need to know what good behavior looks like and they need to know that you will be looking for evidence of those behaviors in the activity.

Then, identify the language functions and vocabulary that students will need to be able to complete the activity. Search in the GSE Toolkit using the soft skill in your search criteria. If the functions or vocabulary are new, these will need to be pre-taught.

Class Level: High-Intermediate (GSE 50-59)

Soft Skill: Collaboration

Sub-skill: Listening and building on ideas

Behavior: Practices active listening in order to understand a speaker’s point of view

Speaking skill:

Can repeat back what is said to confirm understanding and keep a discussion on course.
(GSE 52)

Vocabulary:

- Let me check that I have this right.
- Do you mean...?
- Let me repeat back what you said.
- Let me make sure I understand.

Speaking skill:

Can express disagreement in a manner that shows they were actively listening to the other person. (GSE 58)

Vocabulary:

- Can I stop you there?
- I understand how you feel, but...
- I’m trying to see your point of view, but...
- Shouldn’t we think about...?
- Could I interrupt you for a second?
- I’m not with you.
- I think you are missing the point.

Table 6: *Sample plan for incorporating soft skills into the English lesson (Collaboration)*





Beyond communication, the GSE Soft Skills Framework helps recognise the diverse resources learners bring—especially their plurilingual and intercultural experiences. Soft skills take on deeper meaning when co-constructed through interaction and reflection. This is especially powerful when fostering employability, ethical engagement, and global responsibility. The framework becomes more than a roadmap: it supports learners in building a more coherent sense of self across languages and communities. In a world where communication is identity, soft skills and language together help students grow into global citizens with confidence and purpose.



Silvia Minardi

PhD, Expert Teacher Trainer and Educator

Assessing Soft Skills in English

Key to learning and progress is feedback. Learners need to know how they are performing against the model behaviors. How do we do this?

Prepare a checklist using the Employability Skill Development Frameworks and the GSE Soft Skills data and use this to monitor behaviors during the activity. At the end of the activity, use your checklist to provide examples of good behaviors and areas for improvement.

Evidence of:

- ☐ Repetition of information to confirm understanding
- ☐ Asking for clarification
- ☐ Polite disagreement
- ☐ Putting forward a different opinion
- ☐ Pre-taught vocabulary used

Table 7: Sample checklist (Collaboration)

Building soft skills with the GSE

Integrating GSE Soft Skills into the English language curriculum shows that you are proactively preparing students for their future careers.

As AI continues to reshape industries, the emphasis on soft skills is increasingly crucial. By aligning these skills with the Global Scale of English, you can offer a comprehensive framework that enhances language proficiency and cultivates essential interpersonal competencies.

The result? Your students will be able to navigate a complex, AI-driven world with confidence.



“In today’s AI-driven world, what makes us truly valuable is not just what we know but how we connect and adapt. That’s why I build my lessons around communication—encouraging learners to listen, ask, and express views clearly. These soft skills—collaboration, empathy, critical thinking—can’t be replaced by machines. With the GSE Soft Skills, I am able to integrate these into language learning, so students are better prepared for life beyond the classroom. Teaching English is no longer about language alone; it’s about shaping individuals ready for the complexities of tomorrow.”

Fajarudin Akbar

English Language Teacher and Educational Technology Practitioner



References

- 1 World Economic Forum (2025) [Future of Jobs Report](#)
- 2 Pearson (2025) Digital Language Tutor <https://www.pearson.com/languages/hr-professionals/mondly-by-pearson/digital-language-tutor.html>
- 3 Pearson (2023) [Pearson Skills Outlook: Impact of AI on jobs](#)
- 4 Pearson (2022) [Pearson Skills Outlook: Power Skills Report](#)
- 5 LinkedIn (2025) [Work change report: AI is coming to work](#)
- 6 Pearson (2024) [Future of Global Workforce Decoded](#)
- 7 Inc. (2018) [Costs of poor communication reach \\$37 billion](#)
- 8 Pearson (2024) [How English Empowers your Tomorrow, Pearson](#)
- 9 Pearson (2020) [Employability skills: what makes us employable?](#)
- 10 Pearson (2022) [Collaboration](#)
- 11 Pearson (2022) [Communication](#)
- 12 Pearson (2022) [Critical Thinking](#)
- 13 Pearson (2022) [Leadership](#)
- 14 Pearson (2022) [Self Management](#)
- 15 Benigno, V. & De Jong, J.H.A.L. (2017) [Developing the GSE Vocabulary](#)

About the authors



Mike Mayor

Mike Mayor is Senior Director, Global Scale of English at Pearson. On leaving university, Mike worked as a teacher of English in France before entering the world of publishing as a lexicographer. Mike joined Pearson in 2003 and headed up the Longman dictionaries list until his move to the Global Scale of English in 2013. In this role, Mike works with coursebook and assessment teams to ensure that the Global Scale of English underpins all elements of the Pearson English Journey. He is a frequent speaker at international conferences and teacher training events. Mike has a BA in French and a Masters in English and Applied Linguistics from Cambridge University.



Catherine Doyle

Catherine Doyle is Product Development Director for the Global Scale of English at Pearson, with over 20 years' experience in English language teaching and learning. She began her career teaching in Japan before joining Pearson in 2007. Since then, she has held a variety of roles in test development, programme management, efficacy, and research. In her current position, Catherine leads the R&D work on the GSE and collaborates across the business to embed the scale into Pearson's products. She holds a BA in English and French Literature and an MA in Applied Linguistics.

pearson.com/languages