

Examining the Relationship Between TOEIC Scores and Employability Outcomes of Filipino Graduates

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Abstract

This study investigated the correlation between TOEIC (Test of English for International Communication) scores, aligned with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), on the employability and workplace performance of recent graduates from higher education institutions in Bulacan, Philippines. Utilizing a mixed-methods explanatory sequential design, the research combined quantitative data from 50 TOEIC-certified graduates with qualitative insights from 10 of their employers. Quantitative findings revealed a clear positive correlation between higher English proficiency and key employment outcomes, such as faster job placement, a greater number of job offers, and higher self-perceived employability; particularly, a 0.86 Pearson r correlation between TOEIC scores and self-perceived employability. Graduates with C1 CEFR-level scores secured employment more rapidly and received significantly more job offers than their A1-level counterparts. Qualitative data, analyzed thematically, further revealed that C1-level employees exhibited strong communication competence, adaptability, and professionalism, whereas A1-level employees, although behaviorally competent, displayed limited verbal engagement and required more support in adapting to new tasks or tools. Across both groups, workplace behavior was consistently positive, highlighting that language proficiency did not influence work ethic. These findings reinforce the role of English language proficiency as a decisive employability factor and affirm the relevance of CEFR and TOEIC. The study recommends a stronger integration of CEFR-aligned language instruction in higher education curricula and greater collaboration between academic institutions and industry stakeholders. Delimitations of the study include its geographic and sample size constraints, suggesting directions for future research that could further contextualize language proficiency within diverse employment environments.

Keywords: CEFR, employment, English language proficiency, higher education, Philippine workplace

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Introduction

In a globalized labor market where communication skills are central to collaboration, problem-solving, and service delivery, language proficiency has increasingly emerged as a critical determinant of employability and workplace performance. The ability to communicate effectively in English is particularly vital in countries like the Philippines, where English functions as both an official language and a dominant medium of instruction in higher education (Bernardo, 2004; Tupas & Lising, 2014). The high premium placed on English language proficiency by both local and international employers positions it as a core competency, particularly for new graduates navigating an increasingly competitive job market (Bolton & Bautista, 2004; Ting et al., 2017).

Despite widespread English exposure in the Philippine educational system, the actual communicative competence of many graduates remains inconsistent, raising concerns about their readiness for professional environments that demand both linguistic accuracy and sociolinguistic appropriateness (Hashim & Leitner, 2020; Tupas & Martin, 2017). This disconnect between assumed proficiency and demonstrated ability has serious implications for employment outcomes. Employers across industries frequently cite gaps in oral and written communication as a key barrier to job readiness, particularly in roles requiring teamwork, negotiation, and customer interaction (Bawa, 2020; Otache, 2022). Consequently, it has become imperative to adopt more reliable and standardized measures of English proficiency that go beyond academic grades or self-reported competence.

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) has emerged as a widely accepted benchmark for describing language ability across six levels, from A1 (beginner) to C2 (proficient) (Council of Europe, 2001). Its comprehensive, skill-based approach offers a functional description of what learners can actually do with the language in real-world contexts (North, 2014). In the Philippines, CEFR-aligned assessments are increasingly being used by higher education institutions and employers to inform curriculum design and recruitment processes (SEAMEO INNOTECH, 2021). However, empirical studies linking CEFR levels to real-world employability in the Philippine context remain limited.

One standardized test aligned with CEFR that has gained considerable traction in the employment sector is the Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC). Originally designed to assess workplace English skills of non-native speakers, TOEIC provides a quantifiable and CEFR-mapped profile of an individual's listening and reading comprehension, as well as their speaking and writing competencies in job-related scenarios (Educational Testing Service [ETS], 2020). Employers in the Asia-Pacific region, including the Philippines, have adopted TOEIC as a screening tool for roles requiring cross-border communication or customer engagement (Kawabata 2024; Santos et al., 2024). However, there remains a need for critical investigation into how TOEIC scores translate into actual employability outcomes among Filipino graduates, particularly across different proficiency levels.

Furthermore, while existing literature acknowledges the correlation between English proficiency and employability, few studies explore employer perspectives on how language competence, as measured through standardized tools like TOEIC, translates into real-world performance. In particular, the role of CEFR levels in shaping employer perceptions of communication effectiveness, adaptability, and professional conduct in workplace settings deserves further scrutiny. Given the linguistic diversity and cultural specificity of Filipino

workplaces, it is essential to examine these dynamics through both quantitative and qualitative lenses (Tupas, 2015).

This study responds to that gap by employing a mixed-methods research design to explore the relationship between TOEIC scores, mapped against CEFR levels, on the employability and observed workplace behavior of Filipino graduates. Special focus is given to employer evaluations of graduates at the A1 and C1 CEFR levels, offering insight into how language proficiency influences communication competence, adaptability to workplace demands, and professionalism. Through this approach, the study aims to contribute to a more grounded understanding of English proficiency as not merely an academic achievement but a practical asset that shapes employment trajectories in the Filipino context.

Review of Literature

English language proficiency has consistently been recognized as a critical factor in employability, particularly in countries where English is used as a second language. Numerous studies have examined the influence of language proficiency—often assessed through standardized tools such as the Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC) and the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) on academic success and workplace outcomes. These investigations offer important insights into how test results correspond to real-world communication demands, which lies at the core of the present study.

Prasetya (2023) reported a strong correlation between TOEIC scores and key indicators of career advancement, including job promotions, salary increases, and overall job satisfaction ($r = 0.8$, $p < 0.05$). Utilizing a mixed-methods design, the study revealed that English language proficiency, as assessed by TOEIC, significantly contributed to professional growth and workplace integration. Central themes such as language barriers, global networking, and cross-cultural collaboration emerged, reinforcing the need for functional English in internationalized professional environments.

Similarly, Powers and Schmidgall (2021) validated the predictive capacity of the TOEIC Speaking test, revealing a strong correlation ($r = 0.84$) between test scores and communicative effectiveness as rated by non-expert evaluators across ten countries. This external validation emphasized the test's practical relevance. A follow-up study (Schmidgall & Powers, 2020) demonstrated similar findings for the TOEIC Writing Test, with ratings of written adequacy aligning closely with actual test results ($r = 0.76$). These findings highlight the TOEIC's reliability in assessing communication competence in real-life workplace scenarios.

Kanzaki (2020) supported the use of TOEIC Listening and Reading components as effective proxies for general English proficiency. His findings showed strong inter-correlations among TOEIC's four subtests, especially between listening and reading ($r = .73$) and the lowest between listening and writing ($r = .52$). This supports the practicality of using receptive skill assessments to infer broader language abilities a critical consideration for employers evaluating job applicants.

From a perception and policy standpoint, Minhee and Hyunju (2022) investigated South Korean test takers' views of TOEIC using the Assessment Use Argument Framework. They found that TOEIC was widely perceived as beneficial for both employment and personal language development. However, interpretations of scores varied depending on contextual

variables such as gender, company size, and partner type, suggesting that socio-organizational factors shape the test's use in professional settings.

In the Philippine context, An (2021) found significant differences in TOEIC Listening and Reading scores between students in board and non-board programs, suggesting disparities in language training across academic programs. This highlights the need for targeted interventions to address specific proficiency gaps among student groups. Echoing this, Santos et al. (2024) demonstrated that online intervention programs significantly improved students' TOEIC performance, particularly among first and second-year college students. These findings support the implementation of structured preparatory programs to enhance test outcomes.

Further contextualizing TOEIC's relevance in the Philippines, ETS Global Philippines (2024) reported that over 70% of Filipino TOEIC test-takers were full-time students, and local employers increasingly use TOEIC scores for recruitment and screening purposes. This illustrates the test's institutional and functional integration into the Philippine employment landscape.

The importance of clear score interpretation was emphasized in a Taiwanese study by Powers and Schmidgall (2021), which found that while stakeholders generally used TOEIC scores appropriately, some components of the score report were misunderstood or underutilized. This highlights the importance of transparent and comprehensible reporting to ensure the meaningful use of test results by both applicants and employers.

Complementing TOEIC-based studies, Kaowiwattanakul (2025) examined the effect of multimodal instruction on CEFR-aligned reading proficiency among Thai C1-level EFL learners. Results indicated significant gains in reading skills, validating the CEFR as a useful framework for assessing language competence and preparing learners for real-world communicative tasks, aligning with the goals of the TOEIC.

In Indonesia, Santoso et al. (2024) investigated university students' perceptions of English Medium Instruction (EMI) and found that students viewed EMI as a pathway to enhanced employability. However, a noticeable gap existed between the language needs of students and the support provided. This discrepancy reinforced the necessity for comprehensive assessment tools like TOEIC to evaluate readiness for professional environments.

Diem and Abdullah (2020) assessed the English proficiency of EFL teachers in Southern Sumatra and found that educational level was the strongest predictor of both linguistic and cultural competence. Although focused on teachers, this study highlighted the role of education in shaping functional communication abilities, validating the need for standardized benchmarks, such as the TOEIC, for employment-related assessments.

In Bangladesh, Shahid and Kabilan (2025) explored listening and speaking difficulties among higher education students. They identified issues in pronunciation, fluency, and grammar, as well as non-linguistic factors like anxiety and low confidence. These findings illustrate the broader challenge of bridging academic instruction and real-world communication demands, further justifying the use of performance-based tools like TOEIC.

Additionally, Widiati et al. (2021) studied Indonesian English teachers' views on foreign language literacy using Kucer's (2014) model. The study highlighted the importance of focusing on the cognitive and linguistic dimensions of literacy, underscoring the need for

functional language assessments that closely mirror workplace communication tasks—a principle central to the TOEIC and CEFR frameworks.

Tao et al. (2025) explored the relationship between perfectionism and English proficiency among Chinese university students. Their results suggested a significant association between higher perfectionism levels and increased English proficiency. While not directly tied to employability, the study highlighted psychological factors that may influence performance on high-stakes tests, such as the TOEIC.

Lastly, Styati and Rodliyah (2021) found that students with higher proficiency performed better in peer writing tasks when paired with peers of equal skill. This suggested that language proficiency affects not only individual outcomes but also collaborative productivity—skills that are vital in professional settings. Thus, assessing such abilities through standardized tests like TOEIC can offer employers a more comprehensive view of an applicant's workplace readiness.

Methodology

This study employed a mixed-methods research design to investigate the relationship between TOEIC Listening and Reading scores on the self-perceived employability of recent undergraduates. The integration of both quantitative and qualitative data provided a detailed understanding of how language proficiency, as measured by TOEIC scores, correlates with and potentially influences employment outcomes. Quantitative data focused on measurable indicators such as TOEIC score thresholds (CEFR levels), job placement rates, the number of job offers received, and self-perceived employability. On the other hand, qualitative insights were drawn from selected employers who provided contextualized assessments of their employees' workplace readiness, communication skills, and professionalism. These employer perspectives offered an outsider or etic viewpoint that helped substantiate or contrast with the graduates' own self-assessments.

The study followed an explanatory sequential approach. Initial quantitative findings were used to guide the selection of participants for the qualitative phase and to identify emerging themes for exploration. This approach allowed the researchers to build on the numerical data with narrative descriptions, providing both breadth and depth of insight into employability factors.

Population and Sampling

The study focused on 50 graduates from higher education institutions located in the province of Bulacan, Philippines. These individuals completed their undergraduate programs between 2023 and 2024. The inclusion criteria were specific: participants must have held an active or valid TOEIC Listening and Reading certification during their application and hiring processes and must have secured employment within the validity of their TOEIC certification (2 years). While the geographic focus was Bulacan, employment outside the province was not restricted to allow a broader picture of employability outcomes.

Due to the narrow criteria concerning TOEIC certification and early employment, the study employed purposive sampling. This non-probability sampling technique ensured that only those meeting the relevant qualifications were included. The small sample size reflects the limited number of graduates with verified TOEIC certifications, which is a known limitation but one that ensures the integrity of the study's purpose.

For the qualitative phase, 10 employers or immediate supervisors of the graduate participants were conveniently selected based on their availability and willingness to participate as well as the scores of their respective employees. Employers of 5 individuals with A1 CEFR and another 5 from individuals with C1 CEFR level. These individuals provided insights on how TOEIC-certified graduates performed in real-world professional contexts.

Research Instruments

The quantitative instrument was a structured survey questionnaire designed to gather specific employability indicators. It measured:

- TOEIC Score Thresholds, reported in CEFR levels
- Reason for taking TOEIC
- Job placement status within the validity of the TOEIC certification
- Number of job offers received after graduation
- Work field Placement
- Self-perceived Employability, adapted from Rothwell and Arnold's (2007) established employability scale

Additionally, the questionnaire asked for contextual information such as field of work, and whether the employer specifically required TOEIC certification or any CEFR-equivalent rating as a hiring requirement. The qualitative instrument consisted of a structured essay prompt, which invited employers to describe their observations regarding the employee's communication skills, professionalism, and readiness for the workplace. This format allowed for richer responses while maintaining consistency across respondents. To ensure the validity and reliability of both instruments, the questionnaires were subjected to expert validation and peer debriefing. Two language experts and one research specialist reviewed the tools, and revisions were made based on their feedback. The development and refinement of the qualitative tools were guided by Creswell et al. (2021) and Hirose and Creswell (2023), emphasizing credibility, transferability, and dependability.

Data Gathering Procedure

Data collection was conducted entirely online using Google Forms for both the quantitative and qualitative phases. This method ensured accessibility and convenience, especially given the geographic dispersal of the participants and the constraints of post-pandemic data collection. Reminders were sent to ensure a high response rate, and clarification was provided through follow-up messages when necessary.

Data Processing and Analysis

Quantitative data were processed using descriptive statistics, including means, percentages, and frequency distributions. Visual representations, such as bar graphs and pie charts, were generated to illustrate trends in TOEIC scores, job placement rates, and other key variables. Lastly the TOEIC scores and self-perceived employability's correlation were treated using Pearson r correlation.

For the qualitative data, responses were subjected to thematic analysis. The researcher identified recurring patterns and themes related to communication competence, adaptability, and general workplace behavior. Codes were generated manually and then clustered into

broader categories that aligned with the constructs of employability under investigation. This dual analysis enabled the study to triangulate the findings, enhancing their interpretive richness.

Ethical Considerations

The research followed strict ethical protocols to safeguard the rights and well-being of all participants. Written informed consent was obtained before participation, and respondents were fully informed about the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of their involvement, and their right to withdraw at any point without penalty. All identifying details were anonymized, and responses were assigned unique codes to ensure confidentiality. Data were stored in password-protected and encrypted files, accessible only to the lead researcher. Ethical approval was secured from the university’s Institutional Research Ethics Board before any data were gathered. Particular care was taken to protect vulnerable stakeholders, including students and employees, who may have felt hesitant to share opinions about institutional practices or their professional experiences. The design of the instruments and the presentation of results ensured that no individual or institution could be identified in any published outputs.

Results

Figure 1
Reasons for Taking TOEIC

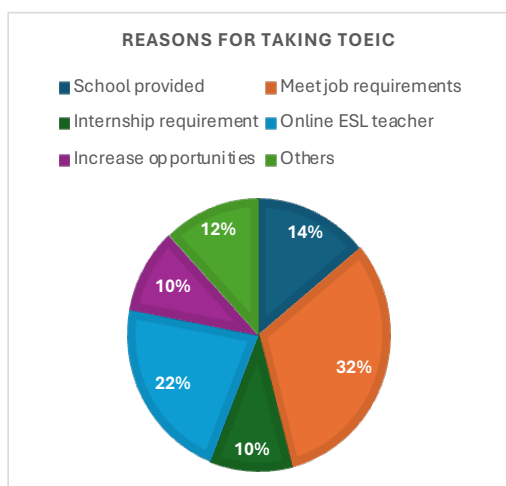
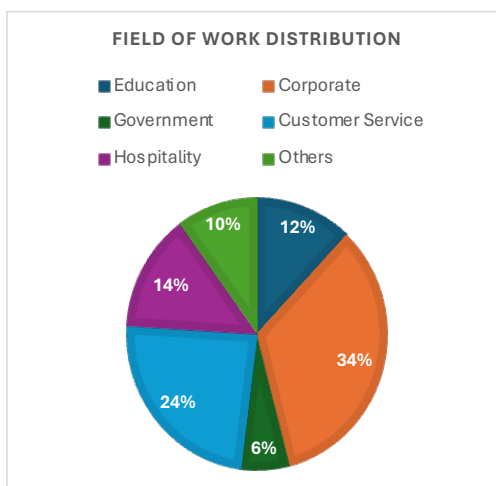


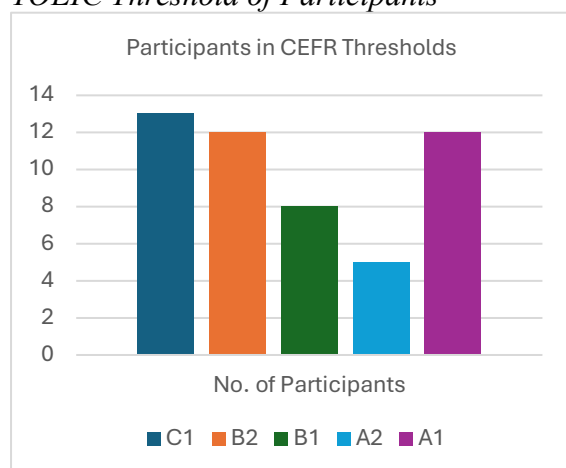
Figure 2
Field of Work Distribution



As illustrated in Figure 1, 7 participants (14%) indicated that they took the TOEIC as privilege since it the testing was school provided. 5 participants (10%) wanted to improve their employment prospects. 16 graduates (32%) stated that it was a job application requirement. 11 (22%) said they needed the certification as they were online ESL teachers. The remaining 11 (22%) cited academic compliance or personal goals. These responses support the claim that TOEIC certification is regarded as a strategic asset for labor market entry, especially in a competitive job market where English proficiency is highly valued.

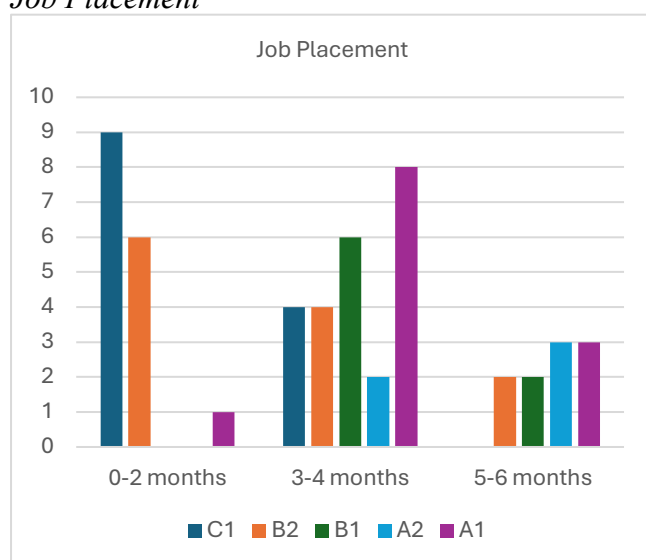
Figure 2 presents the employment sectors of the participants. The highest concentration was in the corporate field, with 17 graduates (34%), followed by customer service with 12 (24%). Hospitality accounted for 7 graduates (14%). The remaining 8 participants (16%) were distributed across government, logistics, and information technology. These data suggest that English language competence, as measured by TOEIC, has broad applicability across sectors that require varying levels of workplace communication.

Figure 3
TOEIC Threshold of Participants



According to Figure 3, 12 participants (24%) achieved a TOEIC score equivalent to the C1 CEFR level (945–990). Another 10 (20%) were at B2 level (785–940), while 13 (26%) scored at B1 level (550–780). Seven participants (14%) fell into the A2 band (225–545), and 8 (16%) scored within A1 level (120–220). This distribution ensured comparative rigor in analyzing how language proficiency correlates with employment outcomes across a range of CEFR levels.

Figure 4
Job Placement



As depicted in Figure 4, all 13 C1-level graduates were employed within the first two months. In contrast, only 1 of the 12 A1-level graduates were employed within that same timeframe. These findings suggest a strong relationship between higher TOEIC scores and faster job placement, reinforcing the test’s predictive value for early career success.

Figure 5
Job Offers by TOEIC Level

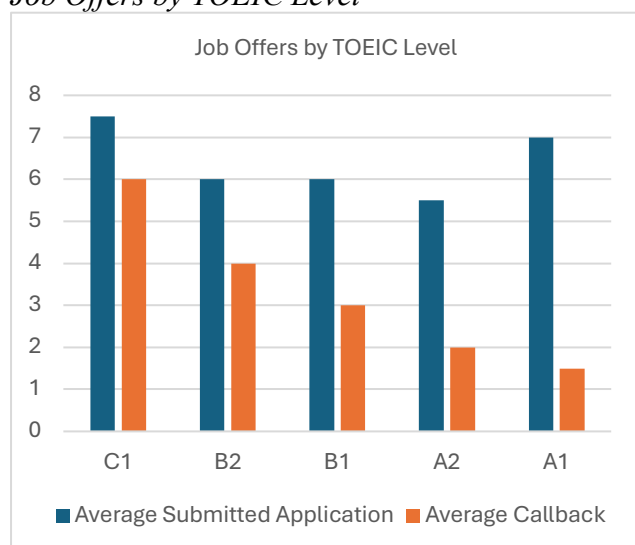
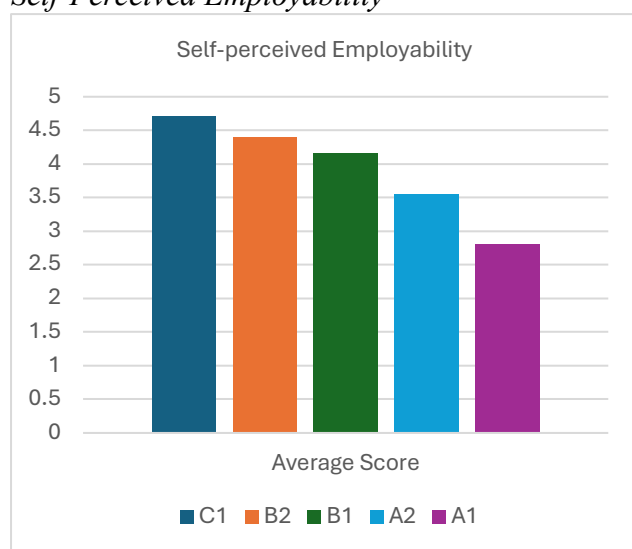


Figure 5 reveals a distinct gradient in the number of job offers received by participants according to their TOEIC proficiency. Graduates with C1-level scores received an average of 6 job offers, while B2-level graduates received 4 offers, and B1-level graduates received 3 offers. A2-level graduates received 2 offers on average, and A1-level graduates reported only 1.5 job offers each. These figures confirm that higher English proficiency significantly increases a graduate’s employability and desirability to multiple employers.

Figure 6
Self-Perceived Employability



The self-perceived employability of participants, measured using a 5-point Likert scale adapted from Rothwell and Arnold (2007), showed a clear upward trend in relation to TOEIC score level (Figure 6). C1-level participants reported a mean score of 4.7, indicating strong confidence in their employability. B2 and B1 levels scored 4.4 and 4.15, respectively. Meanwhile, A2-level participants reported a mean of 3.55, and A1-level participants rated themselves at 2.8. These findings support the proposition that language proficiency not only

correlates with actual employment outcomes but also contributes significantly to a graduate's confidence in their career readiness.

The correlation analysis revealed a Pearson coefficient of 0.86, indicating a strong positive relationship between TOEIC scores and self-perceived employability. This result is consistent with prior literature suggesting that higher levels of language competence are linked to both internal (self-assessment) and external (job market) perceptions of employability. The strength of this correlation underscores the role of English proficiency as both a communicative tool and a psychological resource for job seekers.

Table 1

Employers' Observations on Employees With A1 CEFR Level

Meaning Unit	Codes	Sub-Themes	Themes
"She understands simple instructions, but sometimes asks for clarification."	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • simple instructions • clarification 	Basic comprehension	Communication Competence
"In longer mails and announcements, clarifications are asked by <employee>."			
"He avoids speaking in English during meetings; prefers to listen."	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • avoids speaking • prefers listening 	Passive communication style	
"There are occasional misunderstandings, especially with technical terms."	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • misunderstandings • technical terms 	Limited vocabulary	
"I understand that <employee> is new and that sometimes she's not familiar with terms either related to reports or procurements."			
"He follows routines well but struggles when there's a sudden change in the task."	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • follows routines • struggles with workloads 	Slow adjustment to change	Adaptability
"<Employee> sometimes gets overwhelmed by huge workload but this is not new for fresh graduates."			
"She needs more time to adjust when new tools or systems are introduced."	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • needs more time • new tools 		
"The training she had during her ojt was in public schools and now that she's in a private school, things are kind of new to her."			
"Once trained, he performs consistently."	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • trained • performs consistently 	Dependable after training	
"He underwent a proper training, though not entirely on communication, but he functions well."			
"She comes to work on time and is respectful to everyone."	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • on time • respectful 	respectful behavior	Workplace Behavior
"...very respectful. Always greets his co-workers and blends easily in different age groups."			
"He is cooperative and does not complain, even when assigned extra tasks."	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • cooperative • professional • follows rules 	professional conduct	
"Generally behaves professionally and follows rules."			

Employees with A1 CEFR level exhibit a combination of strengths and limitations in their workplace performance, particularly in the areas of communication, adaptability, and behavior. In terms of communication competence, they generally demonstrate only basic comprehension and tend to adopt a passive communication style. Verbal engagement in English is limited, with many needing frequent clarification or choosing to avoid speaking altogether, especially in professional or technical contexts. When it comes to adaptability, these employees perform adequately within structured routines and show consistency once tasks are learned; however, their ability to adjust to new tools, unexpected changes, or unfamiliar processes is relatively limited, often requiring additional time or guidance. Despite these challenges, their general workplace behavior stands out positively. Employers consistently describe them as punctual, respectful, cooperative, and professional, indicating that while their language and adaptive capacities may be developing, their attitude and conduct significantly contribute to a harmonious and productive work environment.

Table 2*Employers' Observations on Employees With C1 CEFR Level*

Meaning Unit	Codes	Sub-Themes	Themes
"She expresses her thoughts clearly and confidently during meetings."	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • clear expression • confidently 	Articulate communicator	Communication Competence
"<Employee> can spontaneously be assigned as presenter and still nails it."			
"It has not been a term yet I know that he is a good educator based on how he communicate."			
"He can explain complex ideas in English without difficulty."	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • explain complex ideas • no difficulty 	Fluent delivery	
"...terminologies in instructions that might confuse new employees were easily understood by <employee>."			
"She adjusts her tone and language depending on who she's speaking with."	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • adjusts tone • appropriate language 	Pragmatic language use	
"Can be informal with her friends sometimes but definitely formal during presentations."			
"He adapted quickly to our work system, even with minimal guidance."	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • adapted quickly • minimal guidance 	Independent adjustment	
"<Employee> is a fast learner."			
"She manages new responsibilities well but sometimes asks for reassurance."	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • manages responsibilities • asks reassurance 	Independent with occasional validation	Adaptability
"Communicates inquiries if something is not clear."			
"He knows how to cover tasks that are difficult to manage."			
"He is good in finding solutions but prefers clear instructions first."	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • proactive • clear instructions 	Initiative within structured environment	
"Very proactive. Moves without being asked."			
"Always on time."	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • on time • punctual in submission of requirements 	Punctual	
"He makes it a point to always submit his outputs on or before the given deadline."			
"Very respectful to coworkers regardless of gender, position, or age."	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Respectful 		

“<Employee> listens to advice and constructive criticisms.”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • open to feedback 	Positive interpersonal behavior	
“He always asks for comments about an output that he will submit			
"Follows company protocols and provides insights on policies he’s not in favor with."	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • follows protocols • positive atmosphere 	Professionalism	
“She is always smiling and radiates positivity in the workplace.”			

Employees with C1 CEFR level are consistently characterized by strong workplace performance, particularly in communication competence, adaptability, and behavior. Their command of English is marked by high fluency and clarity, enabling them to convey complex ideas effectively and adapt their communication style based on the audience or situation. This allows them to actively contribute to professional discussions and collaborate efficiently across teams. In terms of adaptability, these employees generally adjust quickly to new roles, tools, or systems. While some may initially seek clarification or reassurance, they are typically proactive, demonstrating both initiative and flexibility once they understand their responsibilities. Equally notable is their workplace behavior, which employers uniformly describe as positive. They are punctual, respectful, professional, and cooperative, often contributing to a supportive and productive work environment. Their consistent adherence to company policies and willingness to take initiative further highlight their reliability and value as team members.

Table 3
Side-by-Side Comparison: A1 vs. C1 CEFR-Level Employees

Dimension	A1 CEFR Employees	C1 CEFR Employees
Communication Competence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Understands basic instructions but struggles with complex or abstract ideas. - Tends to be passive or avoidant in English-speaking situations. - Often requires clarification and repetition. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Communicates clearly and confidently in meetings. - Can express complex ideas fluently. - Adapts tone and vocabulary depending on context or audience.
Adaptability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Performs well with routine tasks and familiar processes. - Adjusts slowly to new systems or unexpected changes. - Relies more on structured support. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Adjusts quickly to new environments and systems, sometimes with minimal guidance. - Demonstrates initiative, though some still prefer clear instructions initially. - Manages multiple responsibilities effectively.
Workplace Behavior	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Consistently punctual, respectful, and professional. - Follows rules and performs assigned tasks without complaint. - Demonstrates strong work ethic despite communication barriers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Equally punctual, respectful, and professional. - Shows initiative beyond job descriptions. - Accepts feedback openly and contributes positively to workplace morale.

The comparison between employees with A1 and C1 CEFR levels reveals distinct differences in communication competence and adaptability, while workplace behavior remains consistently positive across both groups. In terms of communication, C1-level employees exhibit a strong and functional command of the English language, allowing them to actively participate in professional discussions, articulate complex ideas clearly, and adjust their

communication style based on context or audience. In contrast, A1-level employees can manage basic interactions but often struggle with more nuanced or technical conversations, limiting their effectiveness in collaborative or communication-intensive roles. Adaptability also differs notably between the two groups. C1-level employees generally show above-average adaptability, responding well to new tasks, tools, or workflows with minimal supervision. Although some may initially seek clarity, they typically become proactive and self-directed once familiar with their roles. On the other hand, A1-level employees are more reactive, performing dependably in structured and familiar settings but requiring more time, guidance, and support when adapting to new or changing work conditions. Despite these differences, both groups demonstrate equally strong workplace behavior. Employers consistently describe them as punctual, respectful, cooperative, and professionally behaved, indicating that while language proficiency may influence communication and adaptability, it does not appear to impact overall work ethic or interpersonal conduct.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The findings of this study underscore the significant role of English language proficiency in shaping employment outcomes and workplace performance among Filipino graduates. Employees with higher CEFR-aligned TOEIC scores demonstrated, as self-reported, markedly better communication competence, adaptability, and employability, with the objective result of the 0.86 Pearson r correlation. These individuals were more active and effective in professional discourse, could navigate complex workplace tasks with minimal supervision, and were more likely to secure multiple job offers within a shorter time frame. In contrast, A1-level employees, although praised for their professionalism and work ethic, faced evident limitations in verbal engagement and required additional support in adapting to new roles or tasks.

These patterns confirm longstanding concerns in Philippine higher education and labor studies regarding the disjunction between academic language exposure and functional workplace communication (Bernardo, 2004; Hashim & Leitner, 2020). Employers consistently emphasized that the ability to articulate ideas clearly, respond appropriately in dynamic interactions, and participate confidently in meetings and collaborative activities are highly valued traits—traits that were mostly present among higher-proficiency individuals. This aligns with research by Tupas and Lising (2014) and Ting et al. (2017), who pointed out that language proficiency directly affects how graduates are perceived and evaluated in employment contexts.

Moreover, the results validate the utility of CEFR and TOEIC as credible benchmarks for assessing workplace language readiness. As noted by North (2014) and the Council of Europe (2001), CEFR provides a transparent and skills-oriented framework, while TOEIC offers a performance-based snapshot of real-world English usage. The ability of these tools to distinguish between merely functional and professionally effective language use has practical implications for employer recruitment strategies and university curriculum planning. Given that 35% of employers in the study required TOEIC and another 25% accepted CEFR-equivalent ratings, the continued institutionalization of these standards in the Philippines appears both justified and necessary (Santos et al., 2024; SEAMEO INNOTECH, 2021).

What stands out most, however, is the consistent finding that work ethic, focused on punctuality, respectfulness, and general professionalism, remained strong across all proficiency levels. This affirms the observations made by Bawa (2020) that Filipino graduates bring to the workplace a cultural orientation toward diligence and cooperation. Language ability, while

essential for communication-heavy roles, does not appear to influence behavioral attributes. Nevertheless, in roles that demand high levels of collaboration, problem-solving, or customer engagement, the absence of strong English proficiency can limit an employee's upward mobility and workplace integration.

Ultimately, the study highlights a dual imperative for Philippine higher education institutions and policy stakeholders: to preserve and enhance the behavioral strengths of Filipino graduates while systematically improving their communicative competence through CEFR-aligned instruction and assessment. Such efforts will better equip graduates to meet evolving labor market demands and affirm the value of language as both a communicative and socio-economic resource.

First, HEIs must integrate CEFR-based language instruction and assessment more systematically across undergraduate curricula. This would require curricular reform that goes beyond basic English competency and moves toward workplace-aligned communicative tasks. The gap between academic English exposure and the linguistic demands of the labor market, particularly in customer-facing, corporate, and professional service sectors, remains significant. Language instruction should therefore emphasize interactive communication, professional writing, oral fluency, and listening comprehension in real-world contexts. Institutions should consider making TOEIC or similar standardized proficiency tests a graduation requirement or a capstone assessment, supported by preparatory modules embedded throughout the academic program.

Second, partnerships between HEIs and industry stakeholders must be strengthened to ensure that language preparation reflects actual workplace demands. Employers in this study frequently highlighted the need for employees who can communicate clearly, respond promptly in team settings, and demonstrate confidence in English-language interactions. Institutions must respond by fostering experiential learning opportunities, such as industry placements and job shadowing, where language proficiency is not only tested but applied in real time. Language educators and career development offices should collaborate to build authentic assessment tasks modeled after professional communication scenarios.

Lastly, employers are encouraged to standardize language proficiency benchmarks in their recruitment frameworks. The inconsistent requirement for English certification observed in this study reflects a lack of alignment between hiring expectations and actual job functions. Organizations that prioritize communication skills should formally integrate CEFR or TOEIC thresholds into their job qualifications and performance evaluation metrics. This would encourage applicants to pursue language certification and would also allow employers to make data-driven hiring decisions.

Limitations

While this study provides important insights, it is essential to acknowledge its delimitations. The sample was limited to 50 graduates from Bulacan, Philippines, all of whom had verified TOEIC certifications and were employed within the validity of their TOEIC scores. The qualitative phase further narrowed the sample to only 10 employers, split between A1 and C1 CEFR employees. This limits the generalizability of the findings to a broader or more diverse population. Future research should extend the geographic scope to include other provinces and urban centers across the Philippines. Longitudinal studies that follow graduates over a longer

period would also help in evaluating the lasting impact of language proficiency on career advancement and retention.

Moreover, the study focused primarily on employer perceptions and did not incorporate triangulated feedback from the employees themselves or from coworkers. Future inquiries should explore how self-assessed and peer-assessed communication skills align with employer evaluations. Expanding the qualitative sample size and including different industry sectors would further enrich the understanding of language's role across various professional domains.

The evidence from this study affirms that language proficiency is not a peripheral skill but a central asset in enhancing both immediate employability and long-term workplace success. Institutions and employers alike must adopt a more deliberate and structured approach to language development, grounded in global standards and responsive to local workforce realities.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The author declares that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this article. The research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest. The author affirms that the data and findings presented are objective, unbiased, and solely based on the outcomes of this research.

Informed Consent

The authors have obtained and recorded informed consent from all individuals included in this study. As mentioned, this paper adhere with the provisions of both the Data Privacy Act of 2012 (R.A. 10173) and the researcher's institutional policies.

Ethical Concerns

The study has been reviewed has been granted Ethics Clearance for implementation by the institutional Ethics Review committee. The study has been assigned study protocol code NUB-IERC-EXT-2025-A0002, which was used for all communication to said committee and all individuals related to this study. This ethical clearance assigned was valid for one year. No artificial intelligence platform was utilized to accomplished this study.

Data Availability

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author, Santos, R., and from their institutional Ethics Review Committee under the protocol code NUB-IERC-EXT-2025-A0002. The data, which contain information that could compromise the privacy of research participants, are not publicly available due to certain restrictions.

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