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E-B Environment - Behaviour Proceedings Journal

GoSET2025Malacca
https://submit.confbay.com/conf/goset2025

e-IPH e-International Publishing House Ltd., United Kingdom

Global Conference on Social Science, Education and Technology 2025
Mudzaffar Hotel, Melaka, Malaysia, 1-2 Feb 2025
Organised by: Maths Proofread and Iman Excellence Center, Malaysia

Decompartmentalising TVET Final Year Projects: Integrating language proficiency through cross-curricular instructional design

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Abstract
Final-year projects (FYPs) in TVET institutions showcase students' technical expertise; however, a gap remains in language and communication skills, which are crucial for workplace readiness. This study examines four FYP assessment rubrics from Universiti Teknikal Malaysia Melaka (UTeM), with a focus on language-related criteria, including report writing, presentation, and professional communication. Findings show that technical skills are prioritised, while language proficiency is underemphasized. The study proposes enhanced rubrics, targeted instruction, and cross-disciplinary collaboration to bridge this gap. These efforts align TVET education with industry needs, supporting curriculum reforms that improve graduate employability in line with the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2015–2025.

Keywords: cross-curricular integration; graduate employability; language proficiency; technical education.

DOI: https://doi.org/10.21834/e-bpj.v10iSI32.7048

1.0 Introduction

Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) programs are designed to equip students with the technical competencies required by industries. In Malaysia, TVET has evolved from its colonial-era focus on agriculture, mining, and small-scale manufacturing into a more diverse system encompassing engineering, technology, and vocational training. However, despite this expansion, the historical emphasis on technical proficiency has often sidelined the development of soft skills, particularly communication and language abilities, which are critical for professional success in today's globalized job market.

1.1 Research Background

A key gap in Malaysian TVET curricula is the compartmentalisation of technical and non-technical subjects, where language and communication skills are not explicitly integrated into core technical training programs. As a result, final-year projects (FYPs)—a crucial component in assessing students' technical competencies—fail to incorporate structured opportunities for developing effective communication. This disconnect has significant implications: Students struggle with articulating their technical knowledge in presentations, their project reports lack clarity and coherence, and their ability to engage in interdisciplinary collaboration remains underdeveloped.

DOI: https://doi.org/10.21834/e-bpj.v10iSI32.7048

1.2. Problem Statement and Objective

Final-year projects (FYPs) in Universiti Teknikal Malaysia Melaka (UTeM) serve as key assessments of students' technical proficiency. However, many FYPs lack structured mechanisms for enhancing language and communication skills, which are crucial for workplace success. For instance, students often struggle with delivering clear and articulate presentations, which limits their ability to convey technical understanding effectively. Additionally, deficiencies in project write-ups result in poorly structured reports that fail to fully capture the scope and significance of their technical achievements, thereby diminishing the impact of their work. This study aims to explore how cross-curricular integration of English language proficiency within FYPs can improve communication competencies and enhance graduate employability in the Malaysian TVET context.

The specific objectives are to evaluate how current FYP rubrics in TVET institutions address both technical and communication skills, (ii) to investigate instructors' and students' perspectives on integrating communication skills into technical assessments, and (iii) to propose practical recommendations for cross-curricular instructional strategies that align with industry demands. This paper is structured into six sections, covering the research background, literature review, methodology, findings, discussion of key components, and a conclusion with recommendations for future research.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Importance of Communication Skills in TVET Education

The development of communication skills as a crucial component in the education of TVET students is increasingly recognised. Communication skills, encompassing written and verbal proficiency, are critical for graduate employability in a globally competitive labour market (Billett, 2014; Satchwell, 2016). While technical skills remain at the heart of TVET education, employers now demand graduates who can articulate their ideas clearly, work collaboratively in teams, and engage with diverse stakeholders (Lynch, 2017; Rajab & Hamzah, 2020).

In the context of Malaysian TVET, this gap between technical expertise and communication proficiency is particularly evident in final-year projects (FYPs), where students need to demonstrate their technical ability but often lack the communication skills necessary to present their work effectively (Hussein, 2020). According to the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2015-2025, soft skills, including communication, are integral to graduate employability, yet these skills are often inadequately addressed within TVET curricula (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2015). The report emphasises the need for a holistic education that combines technical mastery with interpersonal and communication skills, which are essential for integrating into the global workforce.

Recent studies continue to support this need. Suhaili, Razak, and Deni (2025) found that English proficiency, particularly in oral communication, plays a significant role in enhancing work performance among Malaysian TVET graduates. Likewise, Kamaruzaman et al. (2025) identified communication, collaboration, and adaptability as future-ready competencies that TVET graduates must possess in the 21st-century workforce.

2.2 Challenges of Cross-Curricular Integration in TVET

While integrating communication skills into technical curricula is crucial, several challenges arise in implementing this approach. A key issue is the compartmentalisation of technical and non-technical subjects in traditional TVET programs. As noted by Maclean and Wilson (2013), this compartmentalisation limits the development of interdisciplinary competencies, where language and communication are treated as separate from technical skills. This siloed approach can result in graduates who are technically proficient but struggle to communicate their ideas effectively, especially in professional settings that require teamwork, negotiation, and public speaking (Lynch, 2017).

Faculty readiness and curriculum rigidity are also significant barriers to successful cross-curricular integration. A study by Miller and Fox (2017) found that TVET educators frequently face challenges when asked to incorporate communication-focused teaching within technical courses, largely due to a lack of training in interdisciplinary teaching methods. This issue is particularly problematic in engineering and technology programs, where instructors may not feel confident in teaching non-technical skills, further exacerbating the divide between technical and soft skills education (Zainuddin et al., 2019).

Another challenge identified by Muthusamy (2018) is the time constraints within TVET curricula, which are often heavily focused on delivering technical content. Teachers report insufficient time to integrate communication skills development into project-based learning, particularly in high-stakes assignments like FYPs (Varela et al., 2016).

Noraini et al. (2024) highlight that FYP rubrics in multiple Malaysian TVET faculties lack emphasis on communication criteria, reinforcing the siloed delivery of technical and language instruction. These structural barriers hinder holistic skill development.

2.3 International and Malaysian Cross-Curricular Integration

Several international examples have demonstrated successful strategies for integrating communication skills into technical training programs. In European vocational education, a model known as "dual education" effectively combines practical work experience with theoretical learning, and increasingly, communication skills have been integrated into these models (OECD, 2017). For example, in Germany and Switzerland, vocational education is designed to provide students with opportunities to engage in technical presentations and project-based learning that require effective communication with industry professionals (Grollmann et al., 2015). These approaches not only improve students' confidence in presenting technical information but also ensure that they are better prepared for workplace communication (Baethge, 2016).

In Malaysia, the need for cross-curricular integration has been recognised in several national policy documents, including the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2015-2025, which advocates for a more balanced education system that nurtures both technical and soft skills (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2015). However, the practical implementation of such integration within TVET programs remains inconsistent. Research by Sudirman et al. (2017) suggests that, although there is a growing recognition of the need for soft skills training in Malaysian TVET, the integration of these skills into the curriculum is still in its early stages of development.

Many TVET programs focus predominantly on technical knowledge, with little to no structured instruction in communication skills, leaving graduates ill-prepared for the demands of the workforce. This concern is further supported by UTHM (2024), which emphasised that ESL and communication training remain "unsung powers" in TVET, often treated as peripheral rather than central to technical instruction. Meanwhile, Mohd Khirulnizam and Azwin Rahim (2024) demonstrated how a task-based online speaking module effectively enhanced oral skills among polytechnic students, offering a viable instructional approach for future FYPs.

3.0 Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research approach, focusing on rubric analysis to examine the integration of language skills within Final-Year Project (FYP) assessments in various technical programs in UTeM. The methodology comprises two key components: rubric selection and rubric analysis.

3.1 Rubric Selection

The study focuses on rubric analysis from technical faculties at Universiti Teknikal Malaysia Melaka (UTeM). The selection criteria for rubrics included representativeness of various disciplines, comprehensiveness in assessing student performance, and alignment with national education policies. The rubrics were analysed based on their weightage for communication skills, clarity of assessment descriptors, and alignment with employability competencies. The selection criteria for rubrics included (i) diversity of disciplines—ensuring insights from different technical domains; (ii) comprehensiveness—evaluating rubrics that assess written and oral communication aspects; and (iii) alignment with national education policies—ensuring relevance to the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2015–2025.

3.2 Rubric Analysis

The rubrics were systematically analysed to determine the extent of communication skills integration in FYP assessments. The analysis focused on three key areas: (1) weightage of communication skills—identifying the proportion of marks allocated to language proficiency in written reports and presentations; (2) clarity of assessment descriptors—evaluating how explicitly communication-related competencies were defined in grading criteria; and (3) alignment with employability skills—assessing whether communication components reflect industry expectations for workplace readiness.

Initial findings revealed that while technical competencies were thoroughly assessed, communication skills—particularly report writing, oral presentation delivery, and team-based problem-solving—were minimally emphasised or ambiguously stated.

4.0 Findings

The analysis is categorised into three items: Language Evaluation Criteria, Gaps in Language Proficiency, and Suggestions and Recommendations. The detailed analysis of the four rubrics from the Technology Engineering faculty is summarised in Tables 1, 2, and 3 below.

Table 1: Language Evaluation Criteria

Criteria, Gap & Suggestions	**Final Year Project Rubrics**			
	Rubric 1	**Rubric 2**	**Rubric 2**	**Rubric 3**
Language Evaluation Criteria	***Minimal Weightage:*** - The rubric allocates a minimal weightage of 0.50 to "Language," emphasizing grammar, spelling, and punctuation. While this addresses basic language mechanics, it does not evaluate the ability to convey complex technical ideas clearly or adapt language for diverse audiences. - The "Abstract" and "Chapter 1: Introduction" sections assess clarity and completeness but do not explicitly evaluate the linguistic style, coherence, or audience engagement.	***Lacks of Linguistics Clarity:*** - The rubric includes a category, "Effective delivery of ideas," with a weightage of 1.50. This partially addresses oral language skills but focuses more on project familiarity and delivery rather than linguistic clarity, articulation, or audience engagement. - The "Poster" criterion evaluates the organization of content but does not assess the clarity or precision of the written language used.	***Emphasis is more on Technical Skills:*** - Criteria such as "Project Planning," "Project Execution," and "Result and Analysis" centre on technical application, problem-solving, and data interpretation. - Marks are awarded based on the ability to perform experiments, analyse results, and achieve project objectives, with no explicit mention of communication skills.	***No Explicit Criteria for Language Skills:*** - Sections like "Presentation Effectiveness" and "Ability to Answer Questions" might implicitly assume language proficiency but do not explicitly evaluate grammar, vocabulary, or clarity of expression.

This table outlines the existing language evaluation criteria used in assessing technical students' FYP. The focus is primarily on technical and project-related competencies, with limited attention given to linguistic clarity and communication skills. The language evaluation criteria outlined in the rubric emphasise technical and project-related skills while offering a minimal focus on linguistic clarity and communication proficiency. For instance, the "Language" category, which assigns a weightage of 0.50, primarily assesses grammar, spelling, and punctuation. This allocation is small, given the complexity of the text, and does not adequately evaluate the ability to convey complex technical ideas or adapt language for diverse audiences. Sections like the "Abstract" and "Chapter 1: Introduction" focus on the clarity and completeness of technical content but fail to address linguistic style, coherence, or audience engagement explicitly.

Table 2: Gaps in Language Proficiency

Criteria, Gap & Suggestions	**Final Year Project Rubrics**			
	Rubric 1	**Rubric 2**	**Rubric 2**	**Rubric 3**
Gaps in Language Proficiency Assessment	***Missing of Language Criterion:*** - There is no criterion for assessing advanced language skills such as persuasive writing, logical flow, or the ability to contextualize technical content for non-expert audiences. - Communication skills are implied under categories like "Abstract" and "Conclusion," but they lack explicit, standalone evaluation.	***Lacks of Language Proficiency:*** - Oral communication is evaluated primarily for its technical content delivery without explicit emphasis on presentation skills such as tone, vocabulary choice, and adaptability to audience needs. - The poster evaluation lacks a dedicated focus on the linguistic quality of the written content, including its ability to effectively communicate the project scope and results.	***Absence of Language and Communication Assessment:*** - The rubrics lack specific criteria for evaluating students' ability to write comprehensive reports, deliver oral presentations, or effectively communicate technical findings to various stakeholders. - Presentation and documentation are implied but not explicitly defined or weighted in the evaluation process. ***General Conduct and Ethics:*** - While professional ethics and responsibilities are included, the evaluation does not address how well students articulate their ethical considerations or responsibilities in written or spoken formats. ***Alignment with Broader Educational Goals:*** - The lack of language-focused criteria suggests a missed opportunity to align the evaluation process with the interdisciplinary and communication-oriented objectives outlined in frameworks like the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2015-2025.	***Focus on Visual Aids Over Verbal Precision:*** - The rubric emphasizes multimedia use and dressing, which are aspects of presentation, but does not assess how language impacts overall communication. ***Literature Survey and Writing:*** - Although there is a focus on "Using sufficient and related references," it does not address the student's ability to integrate and paraphrase sources effectively, which involves advanced language skills. ***No Reference to Audience Engagement:*** - Effective communication, particularly through language, is key to engaging an audience, but this is overlooked.

The table above identifies gaps in the current evaluation framework regarding language proficiency, particularly in assessing the higher-order communication skills required for professional and academic success.

Table 2 reveals significant gaps in assessing language proficiency, particularly in advanced communication skills. Currently, there is no dedicated criterion for evaluating persuasive writing, logical flow, or the ability to contextualise technical content for non-expert audiences. While communication skills are implied in categories like "Abstract" and "Conclusion," these are not explicitly or systematically evaluated. Similarly, oral communication is primarily judged on technical content delivery, with little emphasis on presentation elements such as tone, vocabulary choice, or adaptability to different audiences. The poster evaluation focuses on visual organisation but neglects the linguistic quality of written content, which is crucial for effectively communicating project findings and scope.

Table 3: Suggestions & Recommendations

Criteria, Gap & Suggestions	**Final Year Project Rubrics**			
	Rubric 1	**Rubric 2**	**Rubric 2**	**Rubric 3**
Suggestions & Recommendations	***Include Specific Sub-Criteria Under "Language"*** - to evaluate coherence, readability, and the use of professional terminology. - Introduce a section focusing on how well the report communicates its findings to non-technical stakeholders.	***Expand "Effective Delivery of Ideas"*** - Include articulation, vocabulary use, and adaptability in oral communication. - Add language-related sub-criteria for the poster evaluation, focusing on clarity, conciseness, and audience appropriateness.	***Incorporate Communication Metrics:*** - Add explicit criteria for assessing report writing, clarity, structure, and technical documentation. - Include marks for oral presentations, evaluating aspects like articulation, audience engagement, and clarity of technical explanations. ***Weightage for Language Proficiency:*** - Allocate specific weightage for communication skills, ensuring a balanced evaluation that reflects both technical and soft skill development. ***Support for Cross-Curricular Goals:*** - Introduce collaborative exercises that integrate communication with technical tasks, encouraging peer feedback and interdisciplinary learning.	***Add Language Proficiency as a Criterion:*** - Include an assessment of grammar, vocabulary, and clarity under sections like "Presentation Effectiveness." ***Evaluate Written Communication:*** - Introduce a criterion to assess the language used in project documents or slides for coherence, conciseness, and professionalism. ***Focus on Question Response Language:*** - In the "Ability to Answer Questions" section, add a descriptor for evaluating how effectively the language is used to convey responses.

Table 3 presents recommendations for enhancing the evaluation rubric by incorporating explicit language assessment criteria to improve students' communication skills in technical settings. From the proposals and recommendations in Table 3 above, some have been targeted and can therefore be implemented in developing a complete and balanced evaluation framework. One of these includes adding sub-criteria, such as coherence, readability, and the use of professional terms, to the "Language" category.

Additionally, introducing a special section for evaluating how reports present their findings to non-technical stakeholders would ensure that students develop the skill of effectively communicating complex ideas to diverse stakeholders. The section "Effective Delivery of Ideas" can be extended to articulation, vocabulary usage, and adaptability in oral delivery. For poster evaluations, the addition of sub-criteria on clarity, conciseness, and appropriateness for the audience would ensure that the written complements the visual and together enhances communication.

The inclusion of explicit communication metrics in the rubric would further strengthen it by assessing report writing, technical documentation, and clarity of technical explanation in oral presentations. Marks can also be awarded for holding the audience's attention and articulation, thereby encouraging students to develop all-around presentation skills.

5.0 Discussion

5.1 Overall Observation

The current assessment rubrics have placed a strong focus on technical and functional competencies, either sidestepping the issue of language or making it an implicit rather than explicit priority. This approach diminishes the important role that effective communication plays in both technical and professional contexts, where clarity of expression, language differentiation for various audiences, and the conveyance of complex information are just as important as technical expertise.

5.2 Deficiencies in Current FYP Rubrics

The analysis across the four FYP rubrics highlights a critical imbalance in the evaluation process. The focus on technical competencies is substantial, while language and communication skills are largely neglected.

Firstly, around 80% of the rubric criteria were devoted to technical deliverables, including project design, implementation, and functionality. These are undoubtedly essential in showcasing a student's mastery of technical knowledge. However, this disproportionate weight reflects an outdated approach to student evaluation, one that overlooks the broader range of skills that graduates must have to succeed in dynamic, interdisciplinary professional environments.

Next, less than 10% of the rubric considered language proficiency aspects such as written communication (e.g., report writing) and oral communication (e.g., presentations). These skills, though critical for the effective dissemination of technical ideas, were undervalued in comparison to technical outcomes. For instance, effective technical report writing is crucial for conveying complex concepts in a way that is accessible and actionable to a broader audience, including non-experts and stakeholders. However, this is frequently underemphasised, leaving students ill-prepared for real-world documentation tasks.

Lastly, a notable gap was the limited assessment of audience engagement and adaptability during technical presentations. In many real-world scenarios, technical professionals are required not only to present their findings but also to engage with audiences who may have varying levels of expertise. The ability to articulate complex ideas clearly to experts and laypersons is key to workplace effectiveness. The reviewed rubrics did not account for this essential skill, instead focusing on the technical content and feasibility of the project itself.

Given these deficiencies, a cross-curricular integration of both technical and communication skills is essential. Drawing from international examples, particularly European vocational training programs, can provide a valuable model for improving the integration of language and communication skills into Malaysian TVET curricula.

5.3 Practical Implications for Graduate Employability

Integrating communication skills into TVET programs directly enhances the employability of graduates. When TVET programs emphasise both technical and soft skills, graduates gain the competence to meet the demands of today's complex and interconnected job market. Below are concrete examples of how these reforms can enhance employability and support the goals of the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2015–2025.

Firstly, improved workplace communication—employers demand employees who can collaborate effectively and communicate across disciplines. By incorporating communication training into TVET programs, students will develop the ability to present their technical knowledge clearly and engage in productive discussions with colleagues from diverse fields. For example, graduates from engineering programs who can present technical findings in meetings, explain complex concepts in clear and concise language, and collaborate effectively across teams will be highly valued by employers.

Next, aligning TVET curricula with work-based learning and industry needs through industry engagement will provide students with real-world experience in applying both technical and communication skills. This could include having students participate in industry internships or work on projects that require cross-disciplinary collaboration, where communication is just as crucial as technical expertise. For instance, an engineering student could work in a team with marketing professionals to design a product and present it to potential investors, demonstrating the application of both technical and soft skills.

Finally, global competitiveness is a key priority highlighted in the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2015–2025. In this context, language proficiency—particularly in English, the global lingua franca—is essential. Integrating English-language communication skills into

technical courses prepares TVET graduates to engage in international projects, collaborate across borders, and navigate the global job market. This integration gives them a competitive edge in industries where multilingual communication is a valuable asset.

5.4 Implementation Challenges

Integrating cross-curricular approaches in TVET programs, particularly in the context of enhancing both technical and communication skills, is essential yet challenging. These challenges highlight the need for systemic change at various levels—educational institutions, faculty, and policy.

First, balancing technical and communication skills remains a significant challenge in TVET education. Many educators struggle to deliver both effectively within the limited time available for instruction. For instance, engineering students often struggle to convey their technical ideas clearly during presentations, frequently relying on jargon that can alienate non-technical audiences. This issue underscores the importance of integrating communication training directly into the curriculum, enabling students to articulate their ideas effectively across various settings.

Secondly, resistance to curriculum reform—specifically, the implementation of integrated teaching models that focus on both technical and soft skills—remains a significant barrier. The entrenched focus on technical expertise limits the integration of critical communication competencies. TVET systems often emphasize disciplinary silos, meaning language and soft skills are treated as separate from technical subjects. Overcoming this requires cultural and institutional shifts to recognise communication as a vital competency for professional success.

Thirdly, faculty training and resource limitations—TVET educators also report challenges in adapting to interdisciplinary teaching, where they need to integrate technical content with communication skills. Faculty training is often insufficient to meet these needs, and resources for revising the curriculum are limited. This situation calls for professional development programs that provide instructors with the necessary tools to teach both technical and communication skills effectively without overburdening existing structures.

Last but not least, the traditional focus on technical mastery—the traditional view of TVET as primarily a means to impart technical skills—tends to overshadow the importance of soft skills, such as teamwork, presentation, and professional communication. As the global workforce becomes increasingly interconnected and collaborative, this narrow focus becomes less adequate. To prepare students for the complex demands of modern industries, there is a critical need for cross-curricular integration that blends technical expertise with interpersonal competencies.

Although implementing cross-curricular integration in TVET programs is complex and challenging, it holds tremendous potential to improve graduate outcomes. By closing curriculum gaps, strengthening faculty development, and fostering collaboration with industry partners, Malaysia's TVET system can produce graduates who are not only technically competent but also strong communicators and collaborators in a globalised workforce. The long-term benefits of this approach—from greater employability to more substantial global competitiveness—highlight the urgency of aligning TVET education with the demands of the 21st-century workforce.

5.5 Limitations of the Study

The findings of this study are limited to selected rubrics from technical faculties at Universiti Teknikal Malaysia Melaka (UTeM). They may not be fully generalizable to all TVET institutions in Malaysia. Additionally, the qualitative nature of rubric analysis does not capture the perspectives of students or employers, which future studies should explore through interviews or surveys.

6.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

The inclusion of languages and communication skills in the FYP presents an important thrust to bring Malaysian TVET curricula closer to the interdisciplinary challenges of today's workplace requirements. It is plausible that TVET institutions can produce the holistic skill set essential to thriving within an interconnected global system by mitigating the loopholes in the present-day FYP rubric, coupled with cross-curricular approaches. TVET institutions can equip students with the comprehensive skill set needed for success in an interconnected world by addressing the deficiencies in current FYP rubrics and embracing cross-curricular approaches.

Future recommendations for research and practice should involve (i) developing common FYP rubrics with the integration of language proficiency and communication skills, (ii) faculty training on pedagogies for interdisciplinary teaching, (iii) encouragement of collaboration between technical and language educators in developing integrated learning activities; and longitudinal studies to determine if cross-curricular integration enhances student outcomes. By embracing these strategies, Malaysian TVET programs can fulfil their mission of producing technically competent graduates who can successfully operate in diverse and dynamic professional environments.

Acknowledgement

The authors would like to acknowledge and extend their special gratitude to Universiti Teknikal Malaysia Melaka (UTeM) for its support and funding of this publication.

Paper Contribution to Related Field of Study

This study adds value to TVET, curriculum development, and ESP by focusing on the long-standing discrepancy between the acquisition of technical skills and the development of communication skills in Malaysian TVET institutions. It brings into focus the negligence of communication skills in FYP assessment and training, demonstrating how existing rubrics overemphasise technical products at the

expense of students' capacity to express, record, and present their work, which are essential abilities within both domestic and international workplaces.

The study recommends a pedagogically viable, interdisciplinary instructional approach that integrates communications components into technical FYPs in support of the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2015–2025 and IR4.0 readiness. It validates the growing necessity for transformative pedagogies in TVET, where technical material, language, and communication are seen as interconnected in an integral manner rather than separately.

In addition, the paper lays the groundwork for future research in instructional design, rubric development, and co-teaching of technical and language teachers. The paper serves as a valuable guideline for policymakers, curriculum planners, and educators interested in enhancing graduate employability, particularly in multicultural and multilingual workplaces. Lastly, this research offers a pragmatic roadmap toward more cohesive, employer-oriented, and communication-enhanced technical education.

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