



## A NEEDS ANALYSIS TO EXAMINE THE EFFECTIVENESS OF LANGUAGE COURSE DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC SITUATION

*H.K.P. Dineshika\**

*The Open University of Sri Lanka*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

In Sri Lanka, the technical colleges provide opportunities for those who want to have a professional qualification after GCE Ordinary Level or Advanced Level. Those technical colleges provide certificate courses and diplomas for varied English language contexts such as professional English, academic English, teaching the English language, etc. The national certificate of professional English (NCPE) is a course conducted by technical colleges in Sri Lanka for thirty-six weeks as a full time or part-time course. I have taken the students from two batches of full-time NCPE courses who completed the program last year at Homagama technical college to carry out this needs analysis study. The learners' English language proficiency level differs and most of them are after a/l students. In general, their proficiency level was UTEL level four. Enrollment to this program does not have any proficiency test or placement test. The four language skills and grammar are taught separately allocating five hours per week for each skill. Self-made teaching materials by the teachers are incorporated throughout this program. Due to the pandemic situation in the country, the session delivery mode changed from physical class to online class via zoom or google meet during the last six months. Therefore, the selected group of students have experiences in both physical class and online class contexts.

#### 1.1. Objectives of the study

- 1) To find the English language needs of the learners and check whether the needs are currently been met.
- 2) To find out their perception about the change in the mode of session delivery to enhance the quality of the course.

#### 1.2. Research Questions

- 1) What are the needs of the learners?
- 2) Have their needs been met due to the change of the teaching mode?
- 3) What are their perceptions and recommendations to improve the quality of the course?

### 2. METHODOLOGY

The NCPE course is conducted for those who are willing to enhance their English language skills in a professional context especially for the students who are after O/Ls or A/Ls. This needs analysis was carried out to find out the linguistic expectations of students and perception for the change in the mode of session delivery to enhance the quality of the course for the next batches.

#### 2.1. Study design

In order to achieve these objectives, a mixed-method study design has been employed with questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. Mutia et al (2019) stated that adopting the mixed-method approach with questionnaires and interviews provide a deeper understanding of the English language needs of the subjects related to the particular field of study. The anonymity of the participants was ensured.

#### 2.2. Sample

Thirty-three registered students for this course from two batches were selected to gather data related to students through questionnaires. The sample consisted of twenty-one female students

and twelve male students. Three English language teachers from permanent staff participated in the semi-structured interviews.

### 2.3. Data collecting tools

In order to collect data, questionnaires and semi-structured interviews were utilized. The questionnaire was distributed among the selected group of students as google forms. As the learners' proficiency level differs the questionnaire was given in both English and Sinhala language. Three semi-structured interviews were carried out with three teachers through WhatsApp audio calls for 30 minutes.

### 2.4. Data analysis

Quantitative data gathered from the questionnaires (questions 1-22) were analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 22. The data for the last question of the questionnaire and the data from the semi-structured interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis.

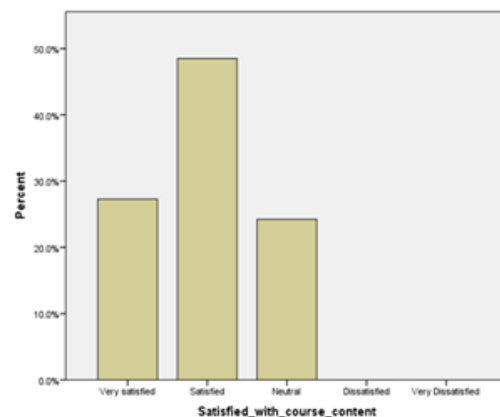
## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Several key findings were identified after the analysis of the data gathered. One key finding is that according to 42.4% of the participants the main goal of enrolling to the NCPE course was to gain the language qualification whereas obtaining entry requirements for employment being 39.4% of participants' goal as shown in Table 1. Therefore, the goal of the learners was in accordance with the objective of this course, which is stated as to cater for learners with communication skills needed for professional involvement. This has been also proven by the learners' satisfaction with the course content to achieve their goal as 48.5% of the students were satisfied with the course content whereas 27.3% were very satisfied as shown in Figure 1. None of the participants was dissatisfied with the course content.

**Table 1: Goal of obtaining NCPE course.**

Goal		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	To gain language qualification	14	8.0	42.4	42.4
	To obtain entry requirement for employment	13	7.4	39.4	81.8
	To be able to communicate fluently with others	6	3.4	18.2	100.0
	Total	33	18.9	100.0	
Missing	System	142	81.1		
Total		175	100.0		

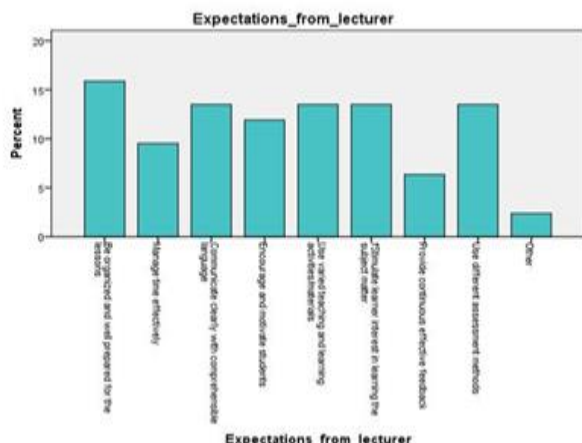
**Figure 1: Satisfaction with the course content**



Based on the analysis, it is found that 15.9% of the participants expect the teachers to be well organized and prepared for the lessons. There are 13.5% of the sample who expects teachers to communicate clearly with comprehensible language, use varied teaching and learning activities/materials, stimulate learner interest in the subject matters and use varied assessment methods as shown in Figure 2.



**Figure 2: Expectations from Teacher**



**Table 2: Expectations from the course materials**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
The lesson materials should increase my English language knowledge	25	14.3	39.7	39.7
It should be well organized and prepared	10	5.7	15.9	55.6
It should be comprehensible	16	9.1	25.4	81.0
It should give me confidence to do more advanced work in the subject matter	12	6.9	39.0	100.0
Total	63	36.0	100.0	
Missing System	112	64.0		
Total	175	100.0		

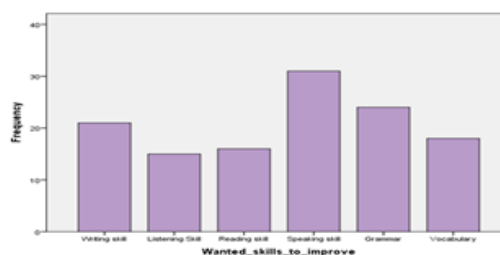
However, as shown in Table 2, though the majority (39.7%) of the sample expect the lesson materials to increase their English language skills, thematic analysis data from the interviews suggest that preparing lessons, activities and materials for the online sessions were challenging as they lack experiences about the technology usage. Moreover, it is found that instead of preparing new lesson materials the teachers tend to copy-paste activities from some resources or use previously used ones for their ease.

Interviewee 3: *“during online classes planning activities and assessment methods were really difficult for me as I have zero knowledge in technology usage and my son is helping me to arrange things.”*

Interviewee 1: *“as the course doesn’t have any textbook, we have to prepare all the lesson materials as teachers include activities according to the level of the learners. Sometimes I tend to copy-paste things from some resources and give.”*

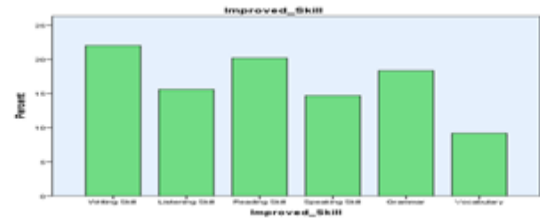
By enrolling on the NCPE course, many of the participants (24.8%) wanted to improve their speaking skills as shown in Figure 3. Need analysis study of Ranasuriya and Herath (2020) on vocational graduates also revealed the importance of speaking skills for professional development. However, according to Figure 4 by the end of the course, they have improved writing skills while speaking skills being the second least improved skill. Therefore, this finding indicates that the learners’ expectations in terms of improving language skills have not been met successfully though they had some improvement. This finding is in accordance with the findings by Mutia et al (2019) study in which both learners and teachers considered speaking skills to be more important, but the learners have improved their writing skills more than the speaking skills by the end of the course.

**Figure 3: Wanted Skill to Improve.**



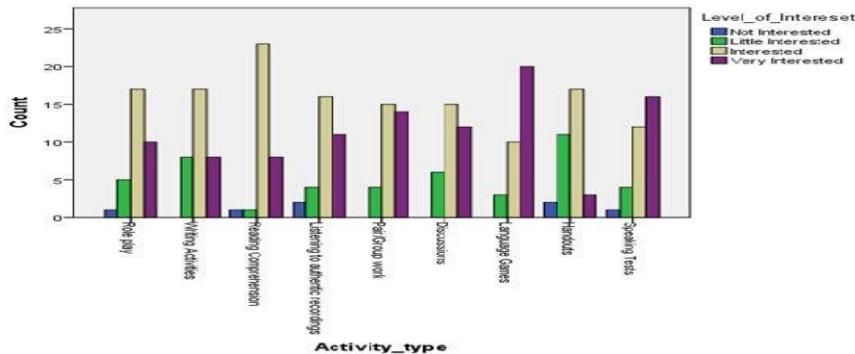


**Figure 4: Improved Skill**



According to the analysis, language games and reading comprehension were the most learner interested classroom activities. Interestingly, it is found that though the learners wanted to improve their speaking skills, there were some learners who were not interested or little interested in speaking activities as shown in Figure 5.

**Figure 5: Level of Interest**



However, this contradicts with the actual in-class teaching and learning methods used by the teachers as shown in Table 3. It shows that speaking activities as the second-highest scored teaching method that helps to develop their language skills in the physical classroom context. Yet, the speaking activities have become the second least used activity type during the online class context whereas the hangouts being the most effectively used method as shown in Table 4. Thus, as an overall finding it is found that though the learners wanted to improve their speaking skills, they were not interested in speaking activities. Yet, it was effectively used in the physical classroom context whereas the limited effective usage was involved during the online class context. The findings of the need analysis study by Ulum (2015) highlighted the importance of using appropriate materials to enhance speaking skills and the use of interesting and authentic materials for the activities as much as possible.

**Table 3: Teaching and learning methods in the physical classroom context.**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Role play	13	7.4	8.6	8.6
	Writing Activities	24	13.7	15.8	24.3
	Reading Comprehension	19	10.9	12.5	36.8
	Listening to authentic recordings	14	8.0	9.2	46.1
	Pair/Group Activities	21	12.0	13.8	59.9
	Discussion	16	9.1	10.5	70.4
	Language Games	14	8.0	9.2	79.6
	Handouts	7	4.0	4.6	84.2
	Speaking Activities	21	12.0	13.8	98.0
	Others	3	1.7	2.0	100.0
Total		152	86.9	100.0	
	System	23	13.1		
Total		175	100.0		

**Table 4: Teaching and learning methods in the online classroom context.**

Effective methods in online class						
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent	
Valid	Discussion	18	10.3	15.1	15.1	
	WritingActivities	15	8.6	12.6	27.7	
	Language Games	18	10.3	15.1	42.9	
	Reading Comprehension	10	5.7	8.4	51.3	
	Handouts	22	12.6	18.5	69.7	
	Listening to recordings	18	10.3	15.1	84.9	
	Speaking activities	10	5.7	8.4	93.3	
	Pair/group work	8	4.6	6.7	100.0	
	Total		119	68.0	100.0	
	Missing	System	56	32.0		
Total		175	100.0			

One interviewee stated that,

*“in our usual classroom we tend to do speaking activities most of the time as games or role-plays. But, using them online is a challenge for us and more focus was given to writing and reading activities during the online classes.”*

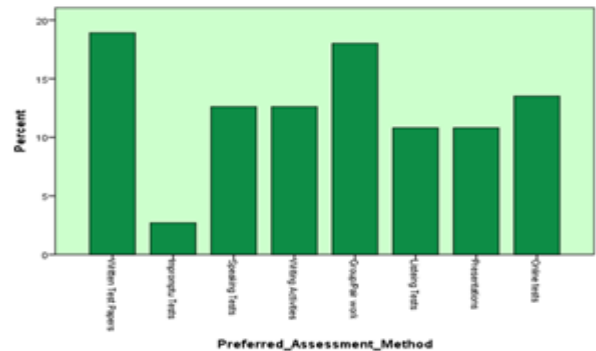
Therefore, it is noticeable that the usage of speaking activities is limited with the change in the mode of delivery. Moreover, this happens with the pair/group work activities.

Learners were most interested in pair and group activities rather than whole class or individual activities, and they were highly effective for their learning in the physical classroom context. However, in the online context, its usage and effectiveness became limited as shown in Table 3, Table 4, and Table 5.

**Table 5: Preference**

Preference		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Online Class	11	6.3	33.3	33.3
	Physical Class	22	12.6	66.7	100.0
	Total	33	18.9	100.0	
Missing	System	142	81.1		
Total		175	100.0		

**Figure 6: Interested method of assessment.**



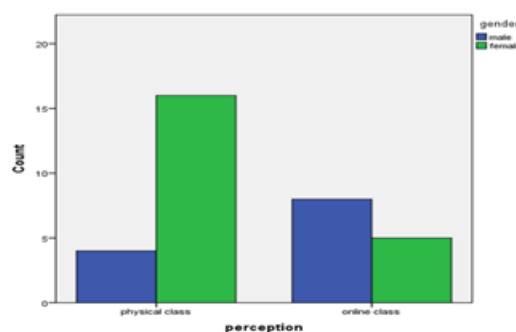
As shown in Figure 6, it is found that 18.9% of the participants are interested in written test papers and the impromptu test was the least favoured assessment method. Interestingly it is found that though the learners did not like speaking activities, as a method of assessing a considerable number of learners like speaking tests. Thus, it is important to find out why the learners are not interested in speaking activities as a method of learning but being interested in as a method of assessment.

As the learners experienced both physical classroom learning and online learning, the study intends to find out their favour regarding the mode of course delivery. The majority of the respondents indicated that their willingness was for physical classroom context as shown in Table 6. However, most of the male students liked the online classes than the female students as shown in Figure 7.

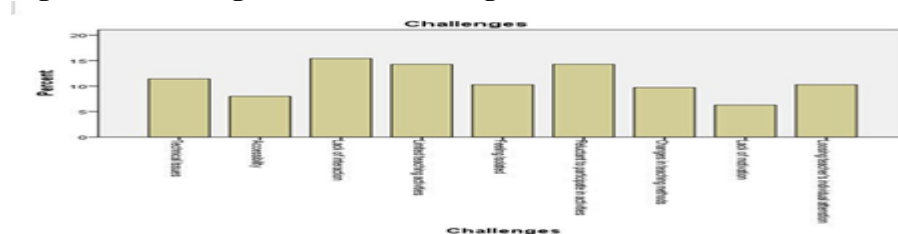
**Table 6: Mode of preference**

gender			
perception	Mean	N	% of Total N
physical class	.80	20	60.6%
online class	.38	13	39.4%
Total	.64	33	100.0%
	Mean	N	% of Total N

**Figure 7: Mode of Preference Gender based**



The quantitative data analysis for the challenges encountered by the learners during the online class contexts indicates the lack of interaction as the most common challenge whereas the use of limited activities and learners being reluctant to participate in activities were also identified as the significant challenges for the learners as shown in Figure 8.

**Figure 8: Challenges in online learning for learners**

Moreover, the qualitative data analysis of interviews revealed that the lack of experiences, using limited activity types, lesser learner interaction, time management, technical issues, teachers being more talkative as the challenges that teachers encountered while delivering the classes online.

*Interviewee 2: "in my classes the learner participation in activities is limited and they get me to talk more in the class."*

Both learners and teachers have recommended that online classes should include more varied activity types and enhance learner involvement. Furthermore, through the interviews, it is found that the teachers need proper training and worksite to conduct the online classes.

*Interviewee 3: "it is good if the institute can provide us with proper training and introduce a site to work as the universities for the betterment of the program".*

The findings of this study are in line with the findings of the need analysis study by Bedoya et al (2015). It is revealed that lecturers encountered the lack of time and effective teaching materials and strategies as the main constraints.

Overall, based on the analysis of this need analysis it is found that physical classroom teaching is preferred by most of the students. Though they wanted to improve their speaking skill they were not interested in speaking activities yet, they like speaking tests as an assessment method. In the physical classroom context, the teachers use speaking activities effectively but in online classes, it has limited usage. In order to improve the quality of the course program both teachers and learners recommended that the usage of varied teaching methods to online class context and enhance the learner participation in activities. Moreover, the teachers recommend that if they can get the proper training that would also be good for the quality of the course. These findings are suggestive of several implications and recommendations for the future need analysis studies of this field.

## 4. CONCLUSION/RECOMMENDATIONS

### 4.1. Implications

The findings of this study indicate that the teachers should utilize more speaking activities to meet the learner needs in the online teaching context. Furthermore, though the course content fulfils the learner needs, the preparation of the lesson materials, activities and assessment methods need to enhance the language skills of the learners. Another implication is that having a proper procedure with proper teacher training to conduct the online classes while maintaining the quality of the course equal to the physical class context. Ensuring a more learner-centred learning context is another implication. All the above-mentioned implications of this study can be taken into consideration to enhance the quality of the NCE course in the online teaching context.



#### **4.2. Recommendations**

Future studies can be conducted with NCPE course registered learners from other technical colleges in Sri Lanka to increase the sample size and to gain more generalizable findings of the learner needs related to the course. These findings can be used to enhance the quality of the program and to cater for the learner needs.

#### **4.3. Conclusion**

Based on the findings of this study it can be concluded that though the learners wanted to improve their speaking skills, by the end of the course their needs have not been met significantly due to the change in the session delivery from physical to online class context. Moreover, the necessity of proper teacher training and online class delivery as well as ensuring more learner participation were found out. In conclusion, the implications and recommendations identified through this study can be employed to enhance the quality of the NCPE course program in both physical and online class contexts.

#### **References**

- Bedoya, P.A., Valencia, L.M., & Montoya, J.C. (2015). Students' Needs Analysis in an EFL Program for University Professors. *HOW*, 22(2), pp 11-36.
- Mutia, D., Lynn, M., Briana, D.T, & Briana, J.C. (2019). An English language needs analysis of information technology students. *Curriculum and Material Design*, pp 1-37.
- Ranasuriya, D.L., & Herath, S. M. (2020). A need analysis on the language skills required by the industry from vocational graduates. *Sri Lanka Journal of Social Sciences*,43(2) pp 85-98.
- Ulum, O.G. (2015). A needs analysis study for preparatory class ELT students. *European Journal of English Language Teaching*, 1(1), pp 14-29.