



Learning Needs Assessment in Purposive Communication among the English Freshmen of Kalinga State University, Philippines

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Abstract— *The study assessed the learning needs in Purposive Communication of the English freshmen of the Kalinga State University. It specifically looked into the (a) importance of the English language to their course; (b) macro skills needed by the students; (c) expectations of the students from their English course; (d) perceived difficulties of students along the five macro skills; (e) situations in which students learn best, (f) factors contributory to language learning of the students; (g) rhetorical patterns that are found useful by the students; and (h) self-assessment of students on their proficiency in the English language. Descriptive research method was used in this study. A survey questionnaire was used in order to assess the learning needs of the college freshman students. The learning needs are presented making use of ranking. The problem on learning needs assessment are categorized and presented in table forms. Categories are based on the six macro skills of the learners. It was found out that students consider their reading very satisfactory, yet they expect to learn more how to read. They also want to improve speaking and reading more than other skills. According to students, they have difficulty mostly in unlocking meanings, organizing ideas, choosing the right words, pronouncing correctly, using appropriate language, and analyzing content.*

Keywords— *needs assessment, learning, freshmen, purposive communication, Kalinga State University*

I. INTRODUCTION

The importance of English language is well recognized in the workplace and in the academe. One's proficiency and fluency in using the language bring advantage to an individual because English is the language in most business transactions. English language also serves as a tie between our people with other nations, and it is the medium of instruction in Philippine schools. In the remarks of Kilgour (1999) on the issue of multilingualism, he quoted the linguist Sapir (2000) who stated that language is not only a vehicle for the expression of thoughts, perceptions, sentiments, and values characteristic of a community. It also represents a fundamental expression of social identity. Sapir further emphasized that the mere fact of a common speech serves as a peculiar potent symbol of the social solidarity of those who speak the language. In short, language retention helps maintain feelings of cultural kinship.

The inclusion of Purposive Communication in English as a general education subject is one of the means in learning the language or if not in developing or enhancing one's skills in using the language. Dealing with the subject necessities is dealing with the learning needs of the students because of various reasons.

The link between "needs analysis" and language for specific purposes is examined by Robinson (2000), Hutchinson and Waters (1996), and Yalden(1987) emphasizing the importance of determining students' needs, "A movement towards learner-centered instruction and away from teacher-centered instruction and the consequent demand that teaching should be designed to meet the precise need of the learner". According to Munby (1978) and Yalden (1983) needs analysis is "the most characteristic feature of ESP course design". Moreover, Richards and Rodgers (1987) view needs analysis as "central to the

processes by which relevant content for specialized language course was determined (<http://www.esp-word.info/Articles-9/Griva/3.htm>).

Educators continue to explore new ways in order to address the problem of students who lack the language ability, thus not achieving communicative competence. Such known phenomenon is regarded as a frustration that result to the assessment of the various methods of teaching as well as revitalization of the curriculum as models in instruction. The offering of Purposive Communication in English as a general education subject as mandated by the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) likewise requires revitalization. Outcomes Based Education (OBE) is among the current trends being practiced in the Philippine educational system to meet the demands of global competition of workforce. This is a method, which uses content as a means of learning a language. Both content and language are equally important and are given the priorities. Brinton, Snow, and Wesche (1989) describe it as an instruction that focuses upon the substance or meaning of the content that is being taught. This is in contrast to “general literacy” or “general language” instruction, which uses topics or subject matter simply as a vehicle for teaching reading and writing, or the grammar or other “mechanics” of English language, as general processes.

According to Chamot and O’ Malley (1994) as cited by Herrero (2005) there are at least four reasons for incorporating content into English as a second Language (ESL) class. First, content provides students with an opportunity to develop important knowledge in different subject areas. Second, students are able to practice the language functions and skills needed to understand, discuss, read about, and write about the concepts developed. A third reason is that many students exhibit greater motivation when they are learning content than when they are learning language only. Finally, content provides a context for teaching students learning strategies. This focus on content knowledge, however, does not require a sacrifice of linguistic skills. On the contrary, Content-Based Instruction (CBI) implies a dual commitment to language and content-learning objectives (<http://revista.inie.ucr.ac.cr/articulos/2-2005/archivos/oral.pdf>). The advent of CBI in classes is seen to be part of the innovation in language teaching. Though it is not totally new, its proliferation is becoming wider in scope among teachers who are handling language particularly English classes.

In the Philippines, English proficiency among Filipinos is rather alarming. Result of board examinations show a decline in the English aptitude of the examinees, and industries find that applicants who are not spontaneous with their speech are growing in number. These are just few of

the problems being faced by educators. Sunstar (2005) published that the dominance of the Filipinos in English language is now in the brink of becoming a myth. Neighboring Asian countries, which have willfully adopted no-nonsense measures to learn the English language are now catching up and have even overtake the Philippines. It was also mentioned that the quality of education the students receive depends largely upon the skills and competence of the teachers; hence, any attempt to solve the English proficiency crisis in the Philippines must start with the teachers.

Understanding the students and their needs is a means of defining a plan, designing material and syllabi. Rouda and Kusy, Jr. (1995) explained that needs assessment is a systematic exploration of the way things are and the way they should be. These “things” are usually associated with organizational and/or individual performance.

Espinosa (1997) emphasized, thus:

The importance of the English language is still widely recognized leading to the different perspectives about second language learning that continue to flourish. Researches seek for resources in order to better understand arising situations concerning issues like the acquisition or learning of another language. Krashen (1991) stated that a second language can be acquired by obtaining a comprehensible input. Shot (n.d.) explained that one way to provide comprehensible input directly to the Limited English Proficient (LIP) students is by teaching content in English using strategies and techniques that make the content comprehensible to the second language learner (<http://www.ncela.gwu.edu/pubs/pigs/pig7.htm>). Through CBI, there is a development of use-oriented second and foreign language skills (Wesche, 1993). Met (1991) on the other hand, proposed that content in content-based programs represents material that is cognitively engaging and demanding for the learner, and is material that extends beyond the target language or target culture. Mohan as cited by Curtain (1985) stressed:

“Language is not just a medium of communication but a medium of learning across the curriculum. The goal of integration is both language learning and content learning. Content-based classrooms are not merely places where a student learns a second language; they are places where a student gains an education.” Instructional resources are very important components in a content based-instruction. These resources are guides in the implementation of classroom activities and are the support to cross-disciplinary works. Reeves as cited by Oliver (1997) said that learning is achieved through a process of constructing knowledge. When a learner is confronted with new knowledge, the learner’s intentions, previous experiences, and

metacognitive strategies are all essential elements in determining what becomes of the knowledge. Furthermore, Jonassen, as quoted by Oliver, et al. (1996) mentioned that effectiveness in any learning environment is based upon the types and levels of cognitive and metacognitive activity engendered in the learners. Hence, learning is enhanced by active environment in which students have cause to be engaged in processing personally relevant content and to be reflective during the learning process but it has to be noted that materials themselves do not teach but provide a medium that with appropriate use can support learning. The role of the teacher as well as the students has to be defined because no matter how good the materials are if they are not properly used with the appropriate people, they will fail in their purpose. Thus, Talmadge and Eash affirmed:

“Instructional techniques are important, but the use of instructional materials also influences student’s achievement, use of process skills, and other outcomes. Instructional materials provide the physical media through which the intents of the curriculum are experienced,”

Materials that are well-chosen and properly designed are the bases of tasks that language learners perform. Nunan (1989) considered communicative task as a piece of classroom work, which involves learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing, or interacting in the target language, while their attention is principally

focused on meaning rather than on form. According to Rico and Weed (1995) the tasks required of students should be appropriate to the discipline and should promote critical thinking. They also emphasized the role of the teacher with regard to the use of materials, and these include: the selection and modification of materials. Selecting material involves an initial choice of whether the teacher wishes to have one primary content source or a package of content-related materials. In modifying text, the goal is to improve comprehensibility without watering down the curriculum and increase clarity by organizing materials.

Better understanding of learning needs as well as development of language skills through assessment is geared towards the study on Learning Needs Assessment on Purposive Communication in English, thus, all the concepts mentioned above help shaped the framework of this study.

Needs Analysis/ Assessment

Hutchinson and Waters (1996) presented two concepts in relation to needs; these are “target needs” and the “learning needs.” Target needs refer to what the learner needs to do in the target situation and learning needs are understood as what the learner needs to do in order to learn. Target needs are further divided into necessities, lack, and wants.

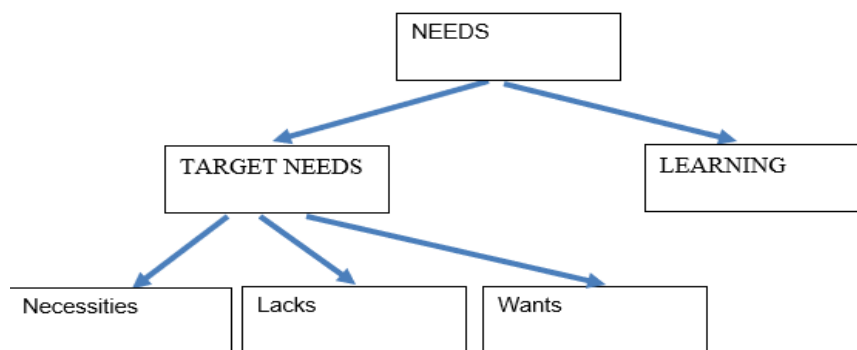


Figure 1. Taxonomy of Needs

Needs analysis refers to the activities involved in gathering information that will serve as the basis for developing a curriculum that will meet the learning needs of a particular group of students (Brown, 1995). It is considered to be an initial step to be taken by teacher inside the classroom. The result of which tells about the present situation of the students in relation to their language skills.

The process of needs assessment involves a set of decisions, actions, and reflection that are cyclical in nature (Graves, 2000).

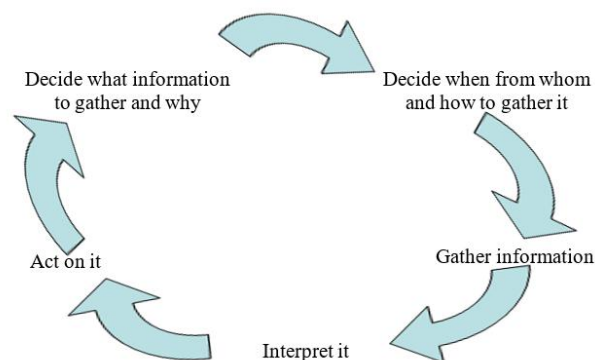


Fig.2. The Needs Assessment Cycle

The cycle entails a process, which identifies the gap between the current and the future situation of the learners. The gap will define the changes in the learning process and learning resources will then fill the said gap. Nunan (1988) stated that needs analysis includes a variety of techniques for collecting and analyzing information, both about learners and about language.

The kinds of information that syllabus designers collect include biographical information such as age, first language

background, reasons for learning the language, other languages spoken, and time available for learning and so on.

Thus, the study determines the learning needs in Purposive Communication among the English freshmen of Kalinga State University, and recommend suggestion for curriculum developers, teachers, and those who are involved in the production of instructional materials on what to consider in targeting the learning needs of the respondents.

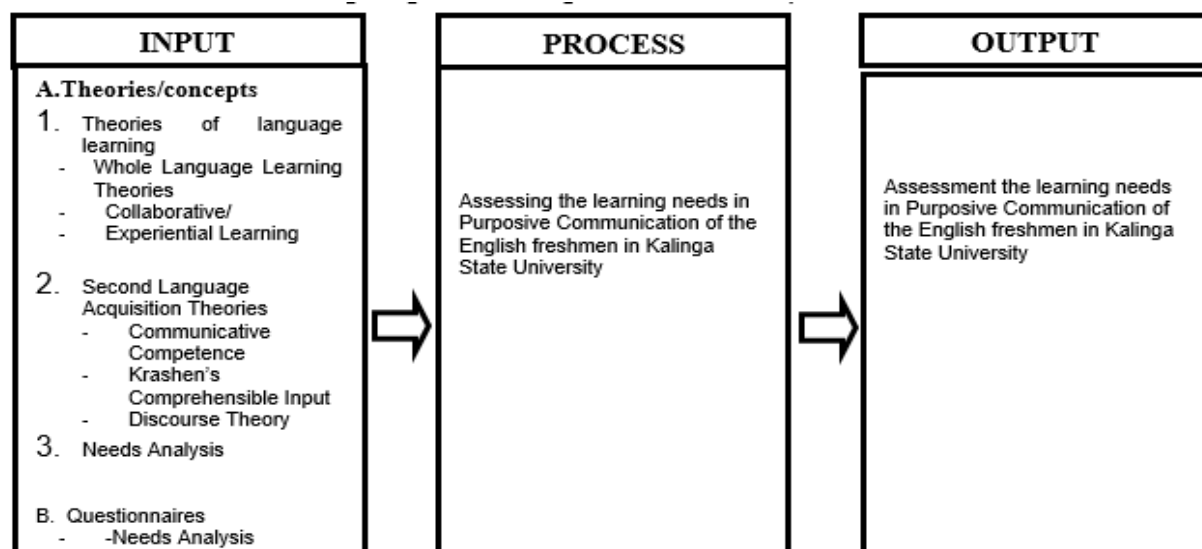


Fig.3 Paradigm of the Study

II. METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted in Kalinga State University during the first semester of school year 2019. Kalinga State University was chosen as the location of the study because it is in the University that offers Purposive Communication in English and it is where the researchers teach English subjects. A self-developed questionnaire based on the literature, related studies and the details of the course and syllabus of purposive communication provided by CHED. It was used to determine the linguistic needs of the college freshman students. The linguistic needs include the following macro-skills: reading writing, speaking, listening, viewing and presenting. To test the validity of the questionnaire, it was pilot tested to students who were not respondents of the study but whose characteristics are similar to those of the respondents.

The data was gathered from the student-respondents in the form of survey questionnaires. The researchers sought permission from the different University Officials:

First, they sought permission to the University President to conduct the study.

Second, they sought permission specifically to the different College Deans or the different College Program Chairmen to administer the questionnaires to the college freshman students enrolled in Purposive Communication classes. Third, permission was sought to the Instructors/Professors who handle the subject Purposive Communication to enter to their classes for the administration of the questionnaires to the student- respondents.

The questionnaires were administered personally by the researchers the moment they got permission from the respective and concerned university officials. They retrieved the same questionnaires after these were answered by the respondents on site.

The discussion and analysis of the data was based on result of the learning needs assessment conducted among the college freshman students enrolled in the Purposive Communication as a GE English subject.

Descriptive research method was used in this study. A survey questionnaire was used in order to assess the learning needs of the college freshman students. The learning needs are presented making use of ranking.

The problem on learning needs assessment are categorized and presented in table forms. Categories are based on the six macro skills of the learners

Table 1. Percent of students who consider Purposive Communication in English as an important subject

Frequency	Number	Percent
Yes	522	99.6
No	1	.2
Undecided	1	.2

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

First, the results of percentage share on importance of Purposive Communication in English as a subject is presented. This is followed by results of the ranking of learning needs of the college freshman student-respondents.

Importance of English language to the respondents' course

1.2. Macro skills needed by the students

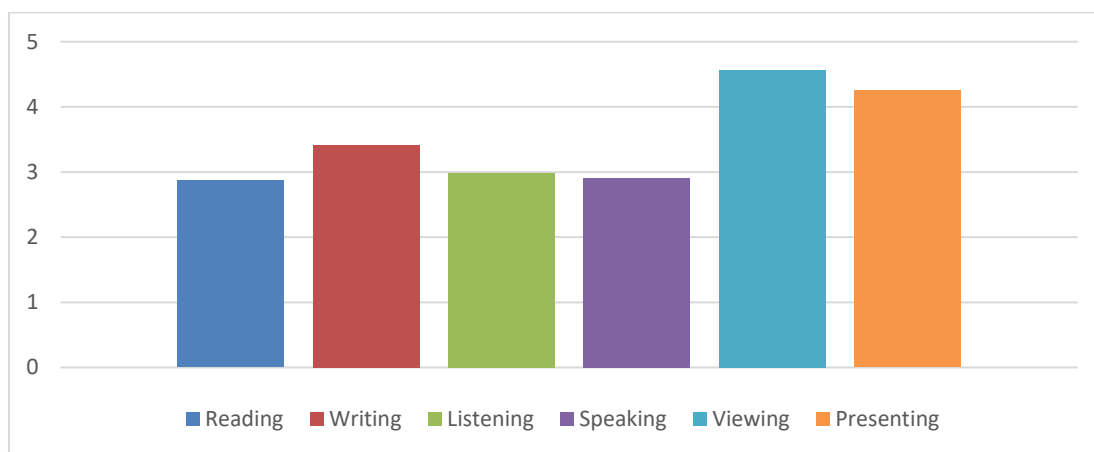


Fig.1. Macro skills of students, ranked according to what they need most

According to the students the skill they mostly need is reading ($x=2.87$, $sd=1.55$). The skill they ranked last is viewing ($x=4.56$, $sd=1.50$). This shows students recognize the necessity of reading which is an important element to have enough input or knowledge in order to be effective in communicating.

Expectations of the students from their English Course

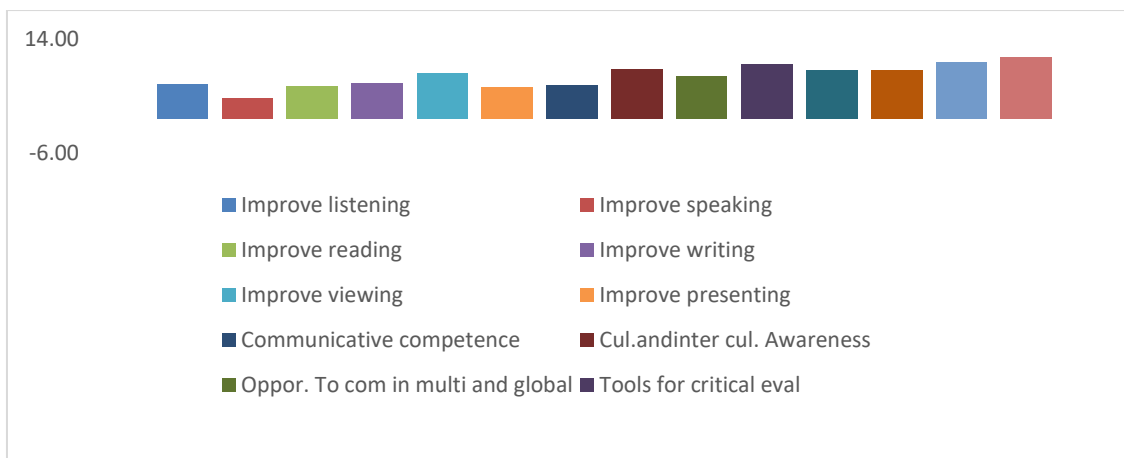


Fig.2. Rank of skills and knowledge students expect to learn

Of the 14 items, students ranked developing their speaking skills ($x=3.53$, $sd=3.27$) as what they most expect to improve. Following closely together, skills in presenting, reading and communicative competence are ranked next ($x=5.43$, $x=5.77$, and $x=5.92$, respectively). The least they expect from the course are editing personal work and cultural and global issues ($x=10.90$ and $x=9.99$).

1.4. Perceived difficulties of students along the five macro skills

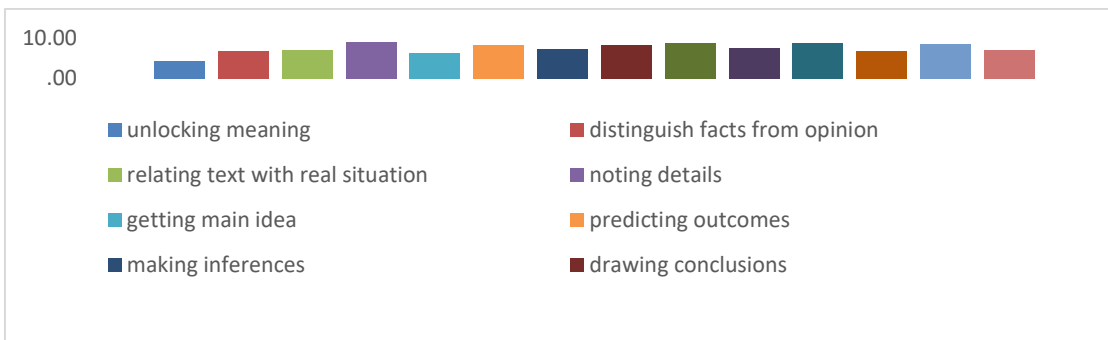


Fig.3 Ranked difficulties of student-respondents in reading

Unlocking meaning is ranked number one problem of student-respondents ($x=4.39$, $sd=4.09$). Following closely are getting the main idea, analyzing content of various texts, and distinguishing facts from opinion ($x=6.35$, $x=6.76$, and $x=6.91$, respectively). Students ranked noting details and forming judgment as least troublesome ($x=8.98$ and $x=8.79$, respectively).

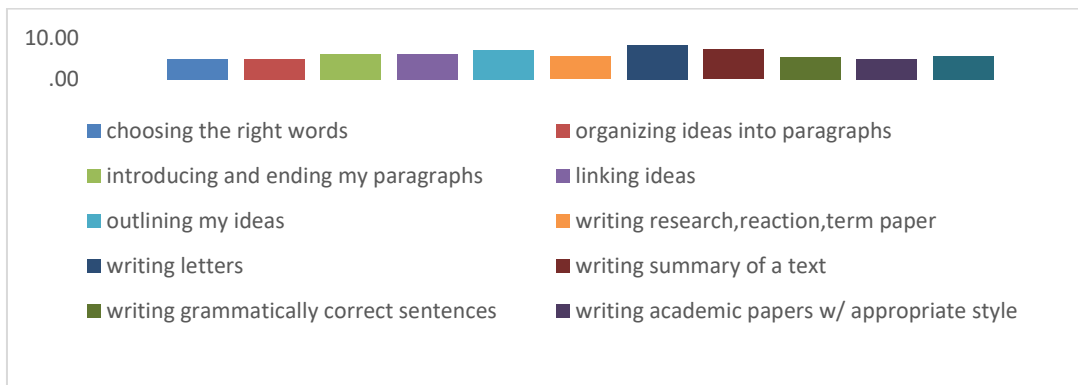


Fig. 4 Ranked difficulties of student-respondents in writing

The two most problematic writing skills of students according to the ranking are organizing ideas into paragraphs ($x=4.95$, $sd=290$) and choosing the right words ($x=4.98$, $sd=3.23$). Following next are skills in writing academic papers with appropriate style, writing grammatically correct sentences, and writing reaction, research or term paper ($x=5.00$, $x=5.44$, and $x=5.48$, respectively). The least difficult for the students are writing summary texts and writing letters, $x=7.21$ and $x=8.26$, respectively.

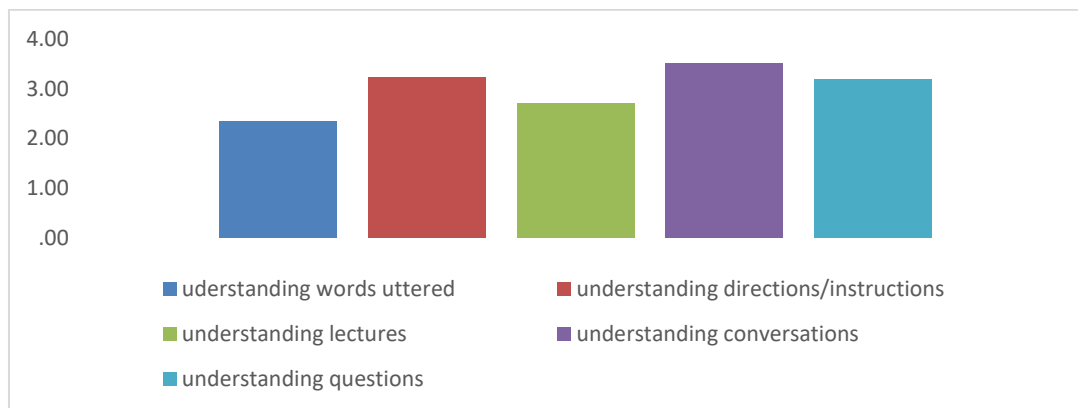


Fig. 5 Ranked difficulties of student-respondents in listening

The student-respondents ranked understanding words uttered as their most difficult task ($x=2.35$, $sd=1.42$), followed by understanding lectures ($x=2.71$, $sd=1.40$). Understanding conversations is the least difficult, $x=3.53$, $sd=1.21$.

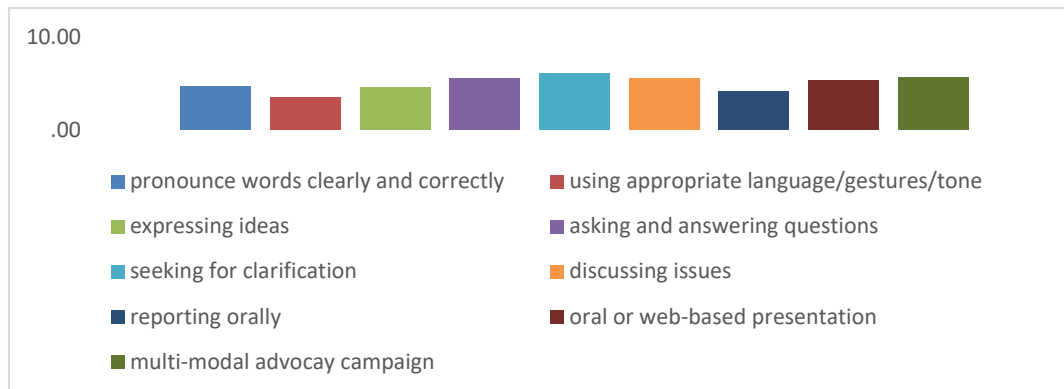


Fig. 6 Ranked difficulties of student-respondents in speaking

According to the ranking, using appropriate language, gesture and tone is the top difficulty among students ($x=3.55$, $sd=2.54$). Following closely together are reporting orally, expressing ideas and pronouncing words, clearly and correctly ($x=4.55$ and $x=4.65$, respectively). To the students, seeking clarification and multi-modal advocacy campaign are last in rank ($x=6.11$ and $x=5.67$).

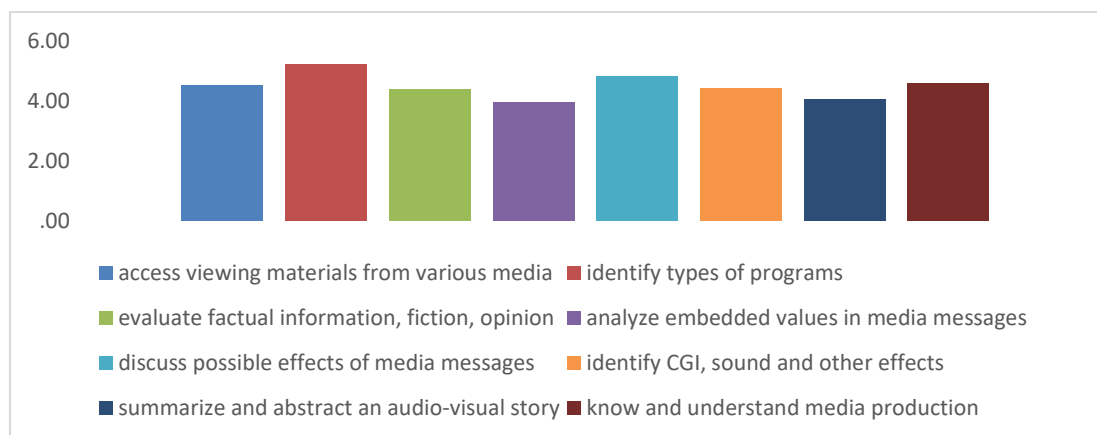


Fig. 7 Ranked difficulties of student-respondents in viewing

Analyzing embedded values in media messages is ranked as the most difficult to the student-respondents ($x=3.95$, $sd=2.18$). Next in ranks are summarizing and abstracting an audio-visual story, evaluating factual information, fiction and opinion, and identifying computer generated images (CGI) sound, and other effects ($x=4.06$, $x=4.38$, and $x=4.45$). It appears however that the viewing skills are closely ranked and there is not much difference. The least difficult to the students is identifying types of programs, $x=5.24$, $sd=2.37$).

1.5. Situations in which students learn best

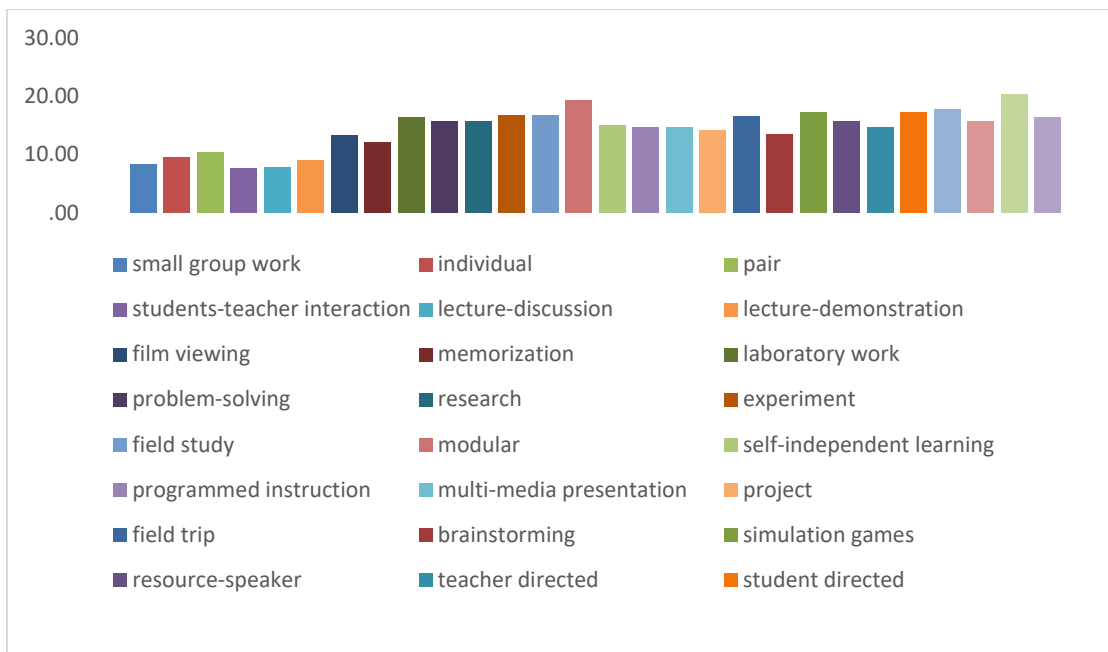


Fig. 8 Ranked situations in which students learn best

According to the respondents, they learn best during student-teacher interaction and lecture discussion, $x=7.73$, $sd=6.77$ and $x=7.86$, $sd=6.75$, respectively. Following next are small-group work ($x=8.27$) and lecture demonstration ($x=9.05$). To them, they learn least through web-based multi-modal learning ($x=20.38$) and modular approach ($x=19.29$).

1.6. Factors contributory to language learning of the students

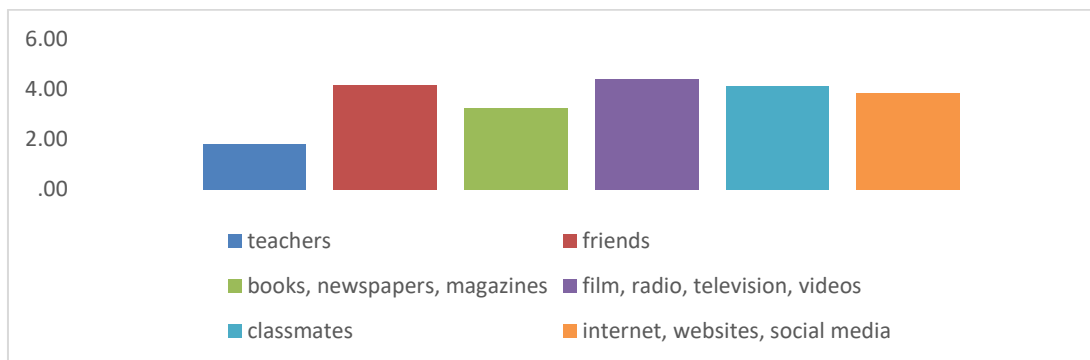


Fig. 9a Ranked factors (people and materials) contributing to students' learning

The students consider teachers as the most influential factor contributing to their learning ($x=1.82$, $sd=1.54$). The next is learning materials like books, newspapers and magazines ($x=3.25$, $sd=1.55$). Film, radio, television and videos are least considered as contributing to language learning of the students ($x=4.39$, $sd=1.52$). Meantime, the students consider the school as still the best place they could learn (see Fig 9b).

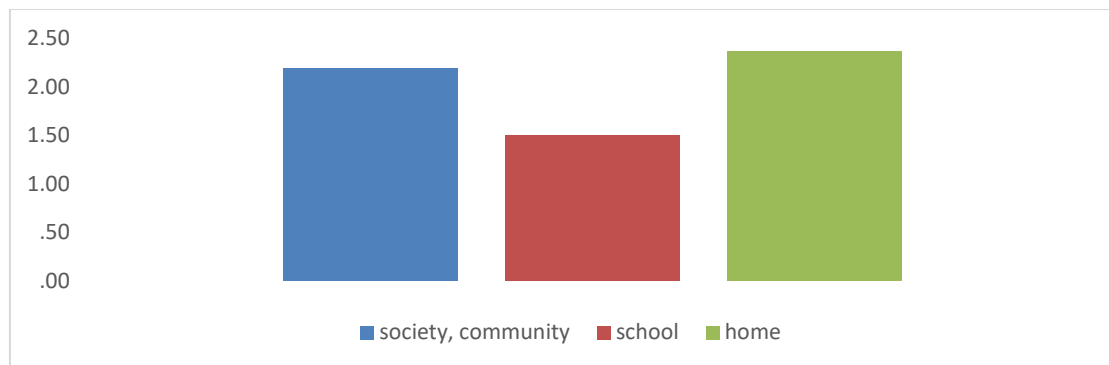


Fig. 9b Ranked factors (places) contributing to students' learning

1.7. Rhetorical patterns that are found useful by the students

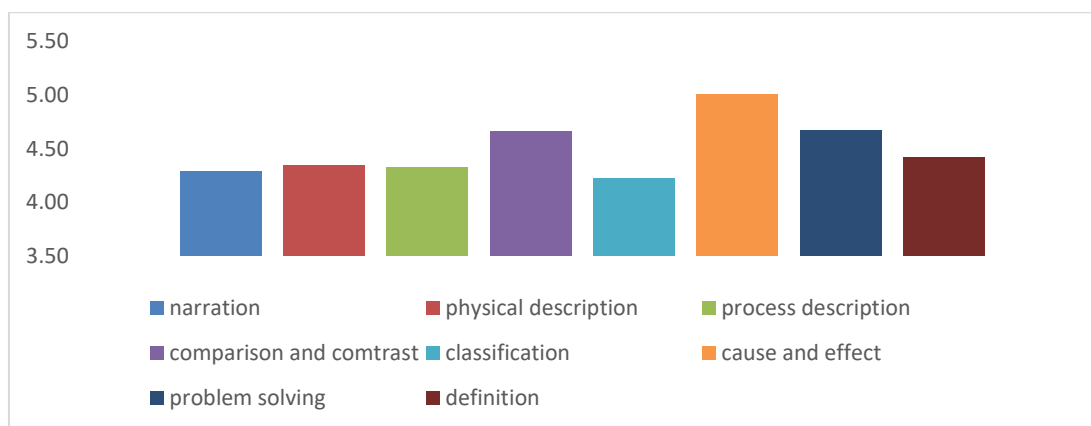


Fig. 10 Ranked rhetorical patterns considered useful by students

Student-respondents ranked 4 items very closely together. The first two are classification and narration ($x=4.23$, $sd=2.06$ and $x=4.29$, $sd=2.35$), followed by process description and physical description. The least useful, according to their ranking, are cause and effect, problem solving, and comparison and contrast, ($x=5.00$, $x=4.67$, and $x=4.66$). Although the ranking shows which is most useful to students, it is emphasized that all items are within the same bracket (4-5), meaning students consider all rhetorical patterns nearly equally important.

1.8. Self-assessment of students on their proficiency in the English language

For this part, the over-all mean of the students is calculated to assess their proficiency level using a 5-point scale. 1 means very poor (very much difficulty), 2 poor (much difficulty), 3 satisfactory (some difficulty), 4 very satisfactory (little difficulty), 5 excellent (with very little difficulty). Interval is calculated according to computation of a five-point Likert scale.

The over-all proficiency level of students is $x=3.48$, which is at the level of very satisfactory. Each item is ranked as well to show which of the five macro skills is rank first and least as shown below.

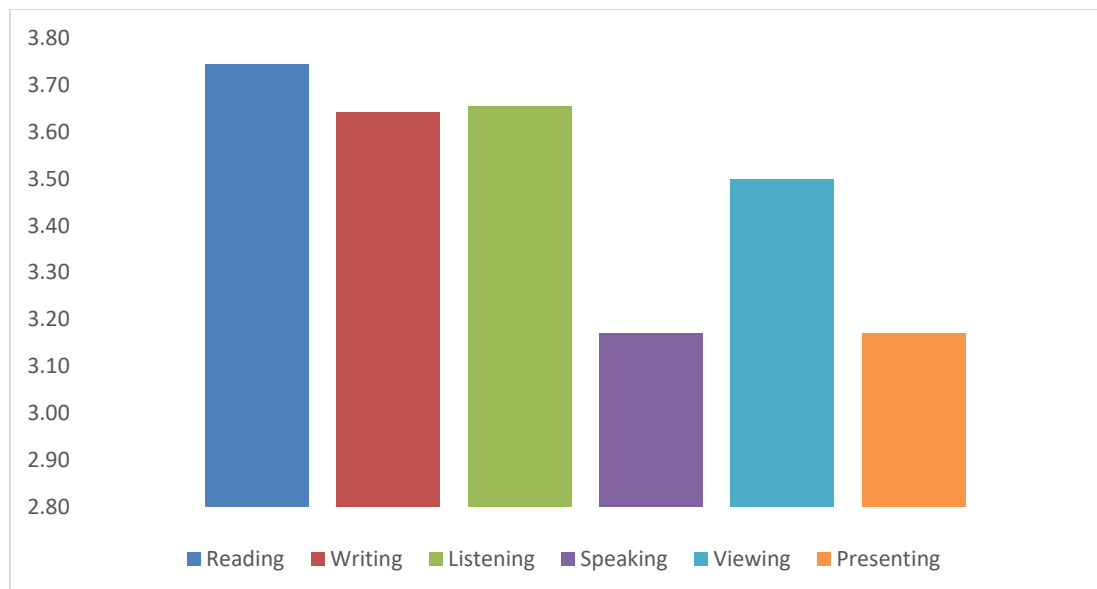


Fig. 11 Macro skills ranked according to self-assessment on students' English Proficiency Level

According to student-respondents' assessment, their reading is highest of the 5 macro skills ($x=3.74$, $sd=1.74$), followed by writing and listening ($x=3.65$ and $x=3.64$), and viewing ($x=3.50$). All four at the level of very satisfactory. Their lowest are presenting and speaking both with mean average of 3.17 at the level of satisfactory.

IV. CONCLUSION

Teachers might have to consider how students perceive their needs. Although students consider their reading very satisfactory, yet they expect to learn more how to read. They also want to improve speaking and reading more than other skills. According to students, they have difficulty mostly in unlocking meanings, organizing ideas, choosing the right words, pronouncing correctly, using appropriate language, and analyzing content. It might be helpful not to send students to varied activities done outside as they think they learn best at school with their teachers and with lecture discussion type.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

More study is needed to be done to look into the details as to the level of students' skills, knowledge and attitude in Purposive Communication in English to further understand the situation of the students and to help teachers target their more specific needs according to the skills, knowledge and attitude they lack the most. Educators have to come up with a variety of practical methodologies or approaches to be of help in the processing of lessons. Furthermore, a research on the learning needs of the students per field/course should be studied to cater their specific needs. Hereto, the language teachers as well as the curriculum developers can make instructional materials needed to their chosen career path.

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