

EES

NDB Impact Evaluation: Supporting 21st Century Skills

Deborah Wyburn 5 May 2021



As a Bank, we recognise that promoting National Economic Growth is of primary importance since a robust economy ultimately contributes to the well-being of every individual. A pivotal factor supporting economic growth is Education, and it is vital that teachers and students are educated in such a way that they can thrive in the world. A holistic approach not limited to head knowledge is very important for students and their future; as well as the well-being of our nation, as these are our future leaders.

In the present world where change is constant and the workforce very demanding, 21st century skills are more important to students than ever before, enabling them to be competitive locally as well as globally.

Proficiency in English is likewise a critical element in the economic progress of our nation, and we have had a long history of supporting the Ministry of Education and the British Council to enhance the skills of English teachers. The *Supporting 21st Century Skills* project was an extension of this partnership, building the capacity of English teachers across Sri Lanka to play their part in supporting their students to develop these critical skills. However, as recognised in the Government's 'Vistas of Prosperity and Splendour' national policy framework for education, all teachers need to act together to ensure that our young people join the workforce with 21st century skills and we trust that the lessons learned from this successful project and outlined in this report will help the Government to make this vision a reality.

Teachers play a fundamental role in a student's education and the quality of teaching has a great influence in a student's academic progress. Education is a long-term investment and as a responsible corporate citizen, NDB strives to make a meaningful contribution to the society through activities that uplift and empower the future of our country. In line with this thinking, NDB has joined hands with the British Council and the Ministry of Education since 2012 to contribute towards enhancing the teaching skills of Secondary English Language Teachers of Government Schools in order to uplift the standard of English teaching in Sri Lanka. We are now confident that the current generation of dedicated and skilled English teachers whom we have supported will be the foundation for a promising future for young Sri Lankans.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Sharon', with a stylized flourish extending from the end.

Sharon De Silva
Senior Manager - Corporate Sustainability
National Development Bank PLC



The NDB-sponsored Supporting 21st Century Skills training programme conducted by the British Council working with Regional English Support Centre (RESC) trainers nationwide is a timely intervention to support teachers of English in improving their classroom practice.

During the external monitoring and supervision sessions conducted in schools by the MoE, Provincial and Zonal officials, formal implementation of the syllabi in classroom practice was observed to be less innovative and interesting to the pupils. Many teachers in their classroom practice were constrained by the textbooks. They do not adopt textbook activities successfully, integrating other supplementary / external materials where necessary, to bring out more innovative and interactive activities to create interest in students. This has an adverse effect on teaching English, particularly on active participation of students in the teaching-learning process.

The findings of the impact evaluation conducted on the NDB funded Supporting 21st Century Skills programme, reveal that a timely intervention with well-structured teacher training can increase awareness, confidence, and readiness of teachers to incorporate 21st century skills into their classroom practice. As a result, students' leadership, employability, and social interaction skills will grow.

Responses from the diverse group of programme participants who participated in the study show that they were at different levels of knowledge and understanding in the integration of six 21st century core skills in their classroom practice prior to the course. However, as shown by the study, the Supporting 21st Century Skills programme implemented by RESCs has significantly improved the confidence and readiness of the teachers to integrate core skills into their classroom practice.

The report on the Supporting 21st Century Skills programme shows that the training had a very high impact on teaching. The participants of the course were confident that the programme helped them to improve their knowledge of integrating the different skill activities into their teaching and thereby maximizing student participation. For example, building citizenship and digital literacy skills through

classroom practice seemed new to many of the participants. Moreover, many participants were of the view that it would be challenging for them to teach said skills as the level of difficulty faced by students would be high. However, those participants who attended the RESC training improved their understanding on integrating skills such as digital literacy and citizenship into their lessons. As some of the study respondents mentioned, lack of connectivity and shortage of devices at rural level poses a challenge to improving digital literacy and only around 50% of teachers have incorporated digital literacy and citizenship into lessons after returning to schools. However, giving teachers skills in incorporating digital literacy into their classroom practice will increase their readiness to conduct online classes, specifically during school closure due to the pandemic, which is a plus point.

Moreover, teachers have changed their perspective on citizenship education from considering it as a subject to pass the exam to considering it as a lifelong skill to be developed for social interaction.

Clear understanding of how to use the learning space and time effectively, will be another significant advantage of the programme. Moreover, providing skills for teachers in adapting the textbook activities to incorporate 21st century skills is a significant achievement of the programme.

Incorporation of critical thinking and problem solving as well as creativity and imagination in classroom practice will give students more opportunities to improve their language skills. The research also showed that activities involving higher order thinking skills, which are less likely to be incorporated by many teachers in their classroom practice, became frequent additions to lessons.

As mentioned in the policy framework for Education Reforms, *Re-imagining Education in Sri Lanka*, the current need and demand for increasing the employability of school leavers is a requirement that needs a strong focus. Integrating 21st century skills in lessons shall obviously help learners to develop the functional, emotional, and metacognitive knowledge and skills required to achieve their higher academic goals, as well as to increase their employability in the highly competitive local and global job market.

Therefore, it is highly recommended to rollout the programme to a wider teacher community in government and government-assisted private schools. However, as suggested by the recommendations in the impact evaluation report, it is necessary to find a more suitable and sustainable model to rollout the programme at zonal and divisional level, as the present RESC training model will not facilitate dissemination of such training to a wider teacher community dispersed beyond the catchment area of RESCs.



P.A.S.P. Jayalath

Deputy Director of Education

English and Foreign Languages Branch

Ministry of Education

Acknowledgements

I would like to give thanks to the many people who supported this evaluation and contributed to this report. To Ms. Sharon De Silva of the National Development Bank and Mr Sanath Jayalath from the Ministry of Education, thank you for your support, particularly in contributing forewords to the report. To the dedicated teachers of English who helped to field test the survey instrument and to their colleagues who shared their experience through their responses to the survey, I would like to give thanks for your thoughtful reflections and wish you every success in your professional journey. To Ms. Sherine Adihetti and Mr Chandana Sujeewa of Ampara RESC, to Ms. Shamila Dharmasena and Ms. Kumari Nawarathne of Anuradhapura RESC, to Mr Prasad Kodituwakku of Eheliyagoda RESC, to Ms. Priyadarshani Gunawardena and Ms. Nilani Karunaarachchi of Gampaha RESC, to Ms. Ruwankumari and Mr. Abeyrathna of Hanguranketha RESC, to Ms. Mithila Weerasinghe and Ms. Romila Kulathilaka of Kurunegala RESC, to Mr. Shobie Handunhewa of Matara RESC, to Mr. Thennakoon Bandara and Ms. Rohini Kulatunga of Monaragala RESC, to Ms. Kamala Wilson and Ms. Dammika Pathirana of Nuwara Eliya RESC, to Ms. Chulani Nilaweera and Ms. Rose Mary Solomon of Trincomalee RESC, to Ms. Benadict and Ms. Jayanthi Pathmarajan of Vavuniya RESC, and Ms. Enoka Pallewatta of Yakarawatta RESC, most of whom participated in Zoom interviews from their homes due to an absence of connectivity at their RESC, thank you for your time and your very valuable insights. I would like to thank Mr. Ian Smith for agreeing to an interview even while in transit to another country. Finally, I would like to thank Dr. Lesley Dick and her dedicated team from the British Council for always being ready to provide an immediate response to any request, often beyond regular office hours and in the middle of COVID-19 related lockdowns.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Recognising that current teacher-centred and didactic teaching methods were not preparing students for life and employment in the 21st century, the British Council and the National Development Bank (NDB), with the support of the Sri Lankan Ministry of Education, implemented the Supporting 21st Century Skills programme to train teachers in how to teach, give students practice in, and incorporate into their lessons, what are recognised as the six core skills essential for preparing young people to live and work in the globalised 21st century economy. These 21st century skills consist of the following: critical thinking and problem solving; citizenship; collaboration and communication; digital literacy; creativity and imagination; and leadership and personal development. Training was delivered by twelve Regional English Support Centres (RESCs).

The concept of the NDB Supporting 21st Century Skills programme was very different to previous NDB-funded courses in that it demanded that participating teachers not only develop the ability to use the English textbook in an entirely new way but also develop an ability to create an enabling environment within which pupils could develop 21st century skills while, at the same time, mastering English language vocabulary, grammar, and function.

This evaluation not only considers whether the training equipped participating teachers with the skills, confidence, and motivation to support the development of 21st century skills in their students but also considers how the programme can be scaled up to support the realisation of the Government's 'Re-Imagining Education in Sri Lanka' policy framework (Presidential Task Force 2020).

The study found that students reacted very positively to changes in the way they were taught English. This was attributed to the activities in the textbook being presented in a novel and unexpected way; to students being encouraged to be genuinely creative and to participate actively in lessons and group work; and to students being challenged to think critically. 62% of teachers said that the reaction of their students was a primary motivator to continue teaching in this way. However, teachers themselves enjoyed not feeling as constrained by the content of the textbook as they had previously felt they were.

Both teachers (and RESC trainers) were convinced of the importance of 21st century skills with 58% of trained teachers saying that what motivates them to continue to support their students to develop 21st century skills, is the conviction that 'it is important for young people to have these skills today'. Moreover, most participants (65%) said that, following the training, they felt 'confident' or 'very confident' in their ability to support their students in this way.

These factors resulted in more than 60% of course participants indicating that they had conducted lessons in their schools to build critical thinking and problem solving, leadership and personal development, creativity and imagination and collaboration and communication skills with the latter two skills being taught by more than 70% of study respondents. However, only around half of the participants indicated that they had conducted classes where they sought to build citizenship and digital literacy skills. As already recognised in 'Re-Imagining Education in Sri Lanka', device ownership is a critical factor with most teachers (92%) saying that the fact that most of their students do not have access to computers or smartphones was 'somewhat challenging' or 'a very big challenge' for them in developing digital literacy skills. The policy of not allowing students to bring smartphones into schools was repeatedly mentioned as a part of the challenge.

Teachers were questioned about whether their exposure to digital literacy as part of the training, encouraged them to make greater use of ICT tools in supporting their students who have been unable to attend school over much of last year due to COVID-19 restrictions. Interestingly, factors such as

device ownership and bandwidth availability appeared to be less important to their response than leadership from the top. Teachers in Hanguranketha, where the zonal education office directed teachers to conduct Zoom classes, were far more likely to have done so than national indicators of the regional distribution of ICT access might indicate.

Teachers found it challenging to adapt the student textbook to teach critical thinking and problem-solving skills and digital literacy with most saying that these topics required the use of supplementary materials or needed to be taught independent of the textbook with materials they prepared themselves. This was also somewhat the case with citizenship education. Consequently, the study recommended revision of the textbook and/or the provision of substantial supplementary materials in a teacher's guide.

This finding mirrored the finding that teachers were far more likely to see early evidence of their students mastering skills such as 'collaboration and communication' (55% of respondents) than 'critical thinking and problem-solving' (16%).

The evidence indicates that teachers wishing to support their students in the development of 21st century skills face a lot of challenges. 88% of survey respondents said that 'a lot of my students are so poor in English it is difficult to do these sorts of activities'. 80% of teachers said they felt that 'the way my students have been taught up until now means that I will have to completely change the way they think and learn' and that this was 'somewhat challenging' or 'a very big challenge'. While survey and Focus Group Discussion responses indicate that programme participants are overcoming these challenges and beginning to conduct lessons to support their students to develop the skills, for teachers to continue this work is likely to require a strong personal belief in the importance of equipping students with 21st century skills, reinforced by education authorities at all levels.

Although the Ministry has included 21st century skills in orientation training for newly appointed principals since 2019, In-Service Advisors (ISAs) were reportedly mostly unaware of 21st century skills and how teachers can best support their students to develop them. Accordingly, a second recommendation was made to train In-Service Advisors (ISAs) and Assistant Directors of English (ADEs) in supporting 21st century skills training so that a consistent and strong message about the importance of developing these skills reaches all teachers.

The current system of examinations was also thought to be problematic. Study respondents identified the crowded curriculum and emphasis of examinations on reading and writing as constraints to spending time to support their students develop 21st century skills. Hence a recommendation of the study is to update examinations. 'Re-Imagining Education in Sri Lanka' recognises the importance of this stating that examinations should target ensuring 'that student assessments target critical thinking and analytical skills, vs. rote learning'. The document further states that the intention is to do this by placing 'less weightage on final, summative examinations and ensure increased emphasis on formative, potentially project-based assignments that evaluate critical thinking, analytical skills and other competencies throughout the year' (Presidential Task Force 2020, p.9).

It is heartening that 'Re-Imagining Education in Sri Lanka' states that 'the national education system must necessarily move beyond its current rigid framework, towards encouraging critical and innovative thinking and the development of 21st century skills and competencies' (Presidential Task Force 2020, p.1) and that it makes provision to ensure that all students have access to devices and Internet connections to support them in doing so. While this study indicates that the training model and content used in the Supporting 21st Century Skills programme will provide a robust vehicle through which to achieve this goal, it is evident that the current RESC training model will not be suitable for a

large-scale rollout. RESCs have to offer training after school or on weekends and often serve a geographically dispersed catchment area where they find it difficult to recruit participants from distant schools. RESCs are also limited to supporting English teachers whereas it is important for teachers of all subjects to gain the capacity to support their students in developing 21st century skills.

Contents

Executive Summary	i
Introduction	1
Approach to the evaluation	3
Findings	3
The reaction of students	6
The reaction of teachers	7
Impact on teaching	11
Impact on students	18
Sustainability	21
Recommendations	23
References	26
Annex A: Survey	27

Acronyms

ADE	Assistant Director of English
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
ISA	In-Service Advisor
iTESL	Improving Teacher Education in Sri Lanka
KII	Key Informant Interview
MoE	Ministry of Education
NDB	National Development Bank
PTF	Presidential Task Force
RESC	Regional English Support Centre

Tables

Table 1: Analysis of impact of possible contributing factors on source of motivation for teachers	7
Table 2: Analysis of impact of possible contributing factors on teacher confidence	11
Table 3: Impact of teacher profiles on readiness to introduce 21 st century skills into classroom teaching.....	11
Table 4: Analysis of impact of teacher profile on readiness to conduct online classes during school closures	12
Table 5: Survey respondent perceptions of ease of adapting the English textbook to teach 21 st century skills	14
Table 6: Impact of teacher profiles on perceived ease of adapting the English textbook to teach 21 st century skills	14
Table 7: Impact of teacher profiles on perceptions of difficulty for their students to develop 21 st century skills	16
Table 8: Early evidence of student 21 st century skills – teacher perceptions.....	18

Figures

Figure 1: Respondent previous exposure to British Council supported courses	2
Figure 2: Location of course participants.....	2
Figure 3: Breakdown of prior course participation by RESC	4
Figure 4: Breakdown of survey respondents by RESC	4
Figure 5: Survey respondents – years of teaching experience	5
Figure 6: Survey respondents – medium of instruction at school	5
Figure 7: Factors motivating respondents to apply course skills in their classrooms	5
Figure 8: Survey respondents self-reported confidence in their ability to support their students to develop 21 st century skills	9
Figure 9: 21 st century skills respondents report supporting in classes since returning to schools	9
Figure 10: Response to question, “Have you conducted any online classes for your students while schools have been closed?”	10
Figure 11: Breakdown of frequency of online classes by RESC attended	10
Figure 12: Respondent opinion of ease with which English textbook can be adapted to teach each 21 st century skill	13
Figure 13: Respondent perception of level of difficulty students will face in developing each 21 st century skill on a scale of 1 (easy) to 6 (very challenging).....	13
Figure 14: Respondent perception of level of challenge for their students to develop digital literacy by RESC attended.....	17
Figure 15: Respondent perception of level of challenge for their students to develop Leadership and Personal Development skills by respondents’ years of teaching experience.....	17
Figure 16: Respondent perception of level of challenge for their students to develop Critical Thinking and Problem-Solving skills by prior course exposure	17
Figure 17: Respondent perceptions of extent to which their students already demonstrate 21 st century skills	19
Figure 18: Respondent perceptions of extent to which their students already demonstrate Collaboration and Communication skills against prior course experience of respondent.....	19
Figure 19: Respondent perceptions of extent to which their students already demonstrate Leadership and Personal Development skills against prior course experience of respondent.....	20
Figure 20: Respondent perceptions of extent to which their students already demonstrate Collaboration and Communication skills against RESC attended	20
Figure 21: Proportion of respondents who cite seeing evidence of 21 st century skills in their students as a source of motivation against prior experience of respondent.....	22
Figure 22: Challenges faced by respondents in introducing 21 st century skills to lessons	22

Introduction

Recognising that current teacher-centred and didactic teaching methods were not preparing students for life and employment in the 21st century, the British Council and the National Development Bank (NDB) implemented the Supporting 21st Century Skills programme to train teachers in how to teach, give students practice in, and incorporate into their lessons, what are recognised as the six core skills essential for preparing young people to live and work in the globalised 21st century economy. These 21st century skills consist of the following: critical thinking and problem solving; citizenship; collaboration and communication; digital literacy; creativity and imagination; and leadership and personal development. The programme was designed in early 2019 and training of RESC trainers commenced in May of that year. The course is divided into 20 units each of which forms the basis of a two-hour training session. In addition to attending these face-to-face training sessions, participating teachers were expected to plan and prepare six lessons or lesson activities, each involving a different 21st century skill, which they then tried out with their students. Their reflections on this were compiled as a portfolio and constituted the course's evaluation system. All participants needed to successfully complete their portfolio tasks in order to pass the course.

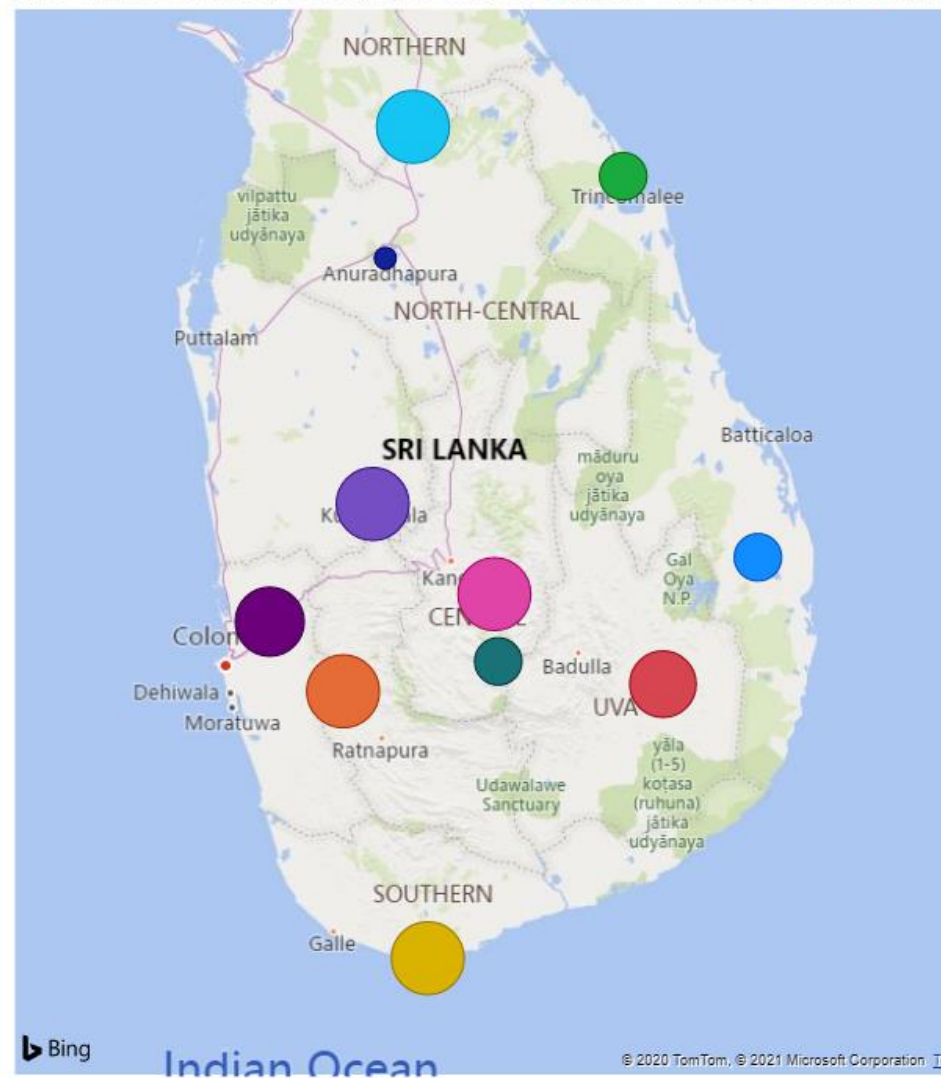
Ten Regional English Support Centres (RESCs) spread throughout Sri Lanka were selected to deliver the course based on their previous participation in NDB English for Teaching programmes. It was intended that each RESC deliver the course to a total of 60 participants (in three phases) with an overall programme target of 600 English teachers. Selected RESCs included Ampara, Eheliyagoda, Gampaha, Hanguranketha, Kurunegala, Matara, Monaragala, Nuwara Eliya, Trincomalee and Vavuniya. As RESCs at Trincomalee and Nuwara Eliya were unable to implement the third phase of training, two additional RESCs, Yakarawatta and Anuradhapura, were brought on board to offer a single phase. Yakarawatta was ultimately unable to offer the programme as the RESC became a quarantine centre for the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic also affected course progress at other RESCs. Figure 2 shows the locations of participating RESCs; the size of bubbles on the map indicate relative numbers of participating teachers as of the time of writing.

RESC trainers initially attended a 5-day trainer-training workshop at the British Council in Colombo in May 2019 before returning to their RESC to implement phase one of the course. Subsequent 3-day workshops were scheduled to be held prior to phases two and three although lockdown measures put in place to control the spread of COVID-19, sometimes resulted in trainer-training workshops and course rollout getting out of sync. These second and third workshops were aimed at refining the trainers' skills in delivering the course, through micro-training, idea-sharing and 'surgeries' for discussing and solving problems. In addition, the second workshop provided input on how to assess the portfolio tasks.

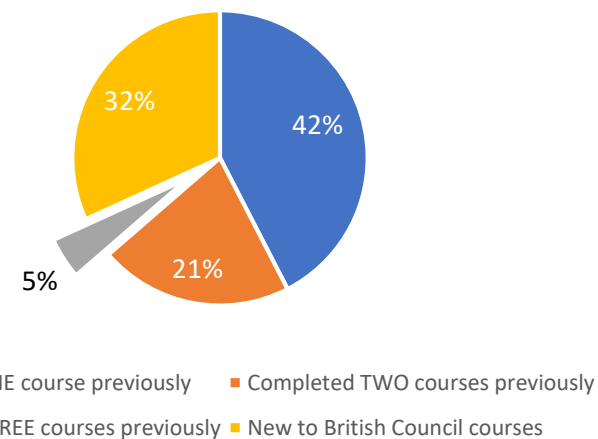
The concept of the NDB Supporting 21st Century Skills programme was very different to previous NDB-sponsored courses and demanded that participating teachers not only develop the ability to use the English textbook in an entirely new way but also develop an ability to create an enabling environment within which pupils could develop 21st century skills as well as mastering English language vocabulary, grammar and function. Because of the anticipated level of challenge, it was intended to offer the programme to English teachers who had previously successfully completed the NDB English for Teaching or a similar in-service teacher training project supported by the British Council. However, an analysis of respondent profiles from the participant survey conducted as part of this evaluation indicate that it is likely that around 33% of participants had never completed these previous training programmes and 41% had only done one such course (Figs. 1 & 3).

Location of participating RESCs and number of course participants

RESC ● Ampara ● Anurad... ● Eheliyag... ● Gampaha ● Hangur... ● Kuruneg... ● Matara ● Mon...



Previous exposure to British Council courses



▲ Figure 1: Respondent previous exposure to British Council supported courses

◀ Figure 2: Location of course participants (bubble size represents participant number)

Approach to the evaluation

While the NDB Supporting 21st Century Skills programme will only be offered once, the lessons learned from the implementation of the programme and indications of early impact on participating teachers and their students will have important implications for current government initiatives to equip all young Sri Lankans with 21st century skills. Consequently, the evaluation questions posed were:

1. Did participating teachers complete the programme with an appreciation of the importance of equipping their pupils with 21st century skills?
2. Did participating teachers complete the programme with the confidence and ability to nurture the development of 21st century skills in their students?
3. Are there indications that, after returning to their schools, participating teachers are adapting English lessons to support the development of 21st century skills?
4. If so, are there early indications of the success of these efforts?
5. What can be learned from the implementation of the NDB Supporting 21st Century Skills programme to support the realisation of the government's 'Vistas of Prosperity and Splendour' national policy framework, for education.

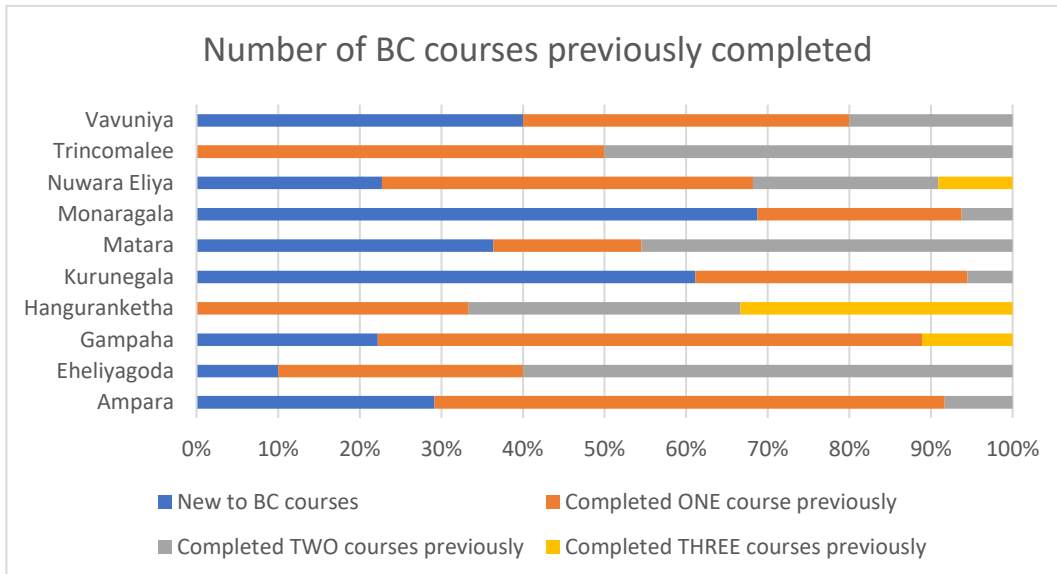
Sources of information drawn on for the evaluation included:

1. Key informant interviews with trainers at all participating RESCs
2. Key informant interview with British Council trainer, Ian Smith
3. Key informant interview with P.A.S.P.Jayalath, Deputy Director of Education, Coordinator / Project iTESL, Ministry of Education
4. Desk review of British Council monthly reports and reports of monitoring visits to observe RESC training
5. Focus group discussions with 14 early phase programme participants
6. Online survey of early phase programme participants (Annex A)

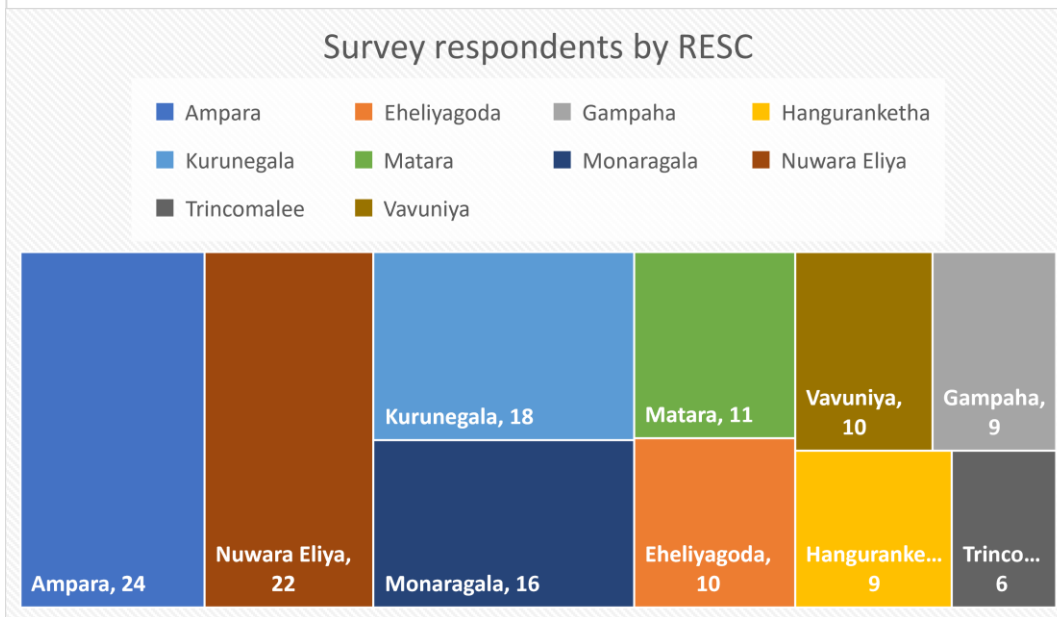
Findings from FGDs with early phase participants were used to design the survey ensuring the relevance of response options offered and enabling most questions to be formatted as close ended questions. It was hoped that limiting the number of open-ended questions, and hence the time required to complete the survey, would increase the survey response rate.

Findings

The online survey targeted only participants of early phases of the programme as the opportunity for participants of later phases to use their new knowledge and skills in their own classrooms has been limited by school closures due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The survey was sent to 267 participants for which the British Council maintained active email addresses and was completed by 137 teachers – a response rate of 51%. Responses were received from teachers at all participating RESCs except for Anuradhapura which has only been able to complete three modules of one phase of the programme due to issues related to the pandemic. The breakdown of number of responses by RESC is shown in figure 4.



◀ Figure 3: Breakdown of prior course participation by RESC



◀ Figure 4: Breakdown of survey respondents by RESC

Years of teaching experience

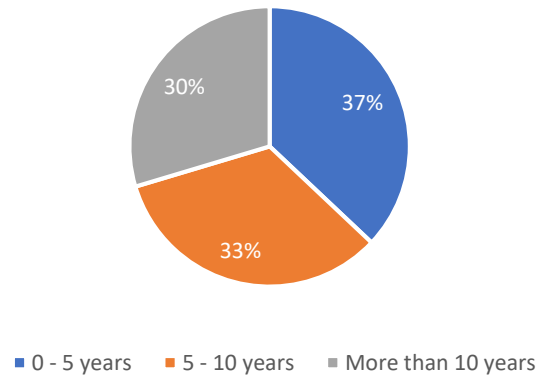


Figure 5: Survey respondents - years of teaching experience

Medium of instruction

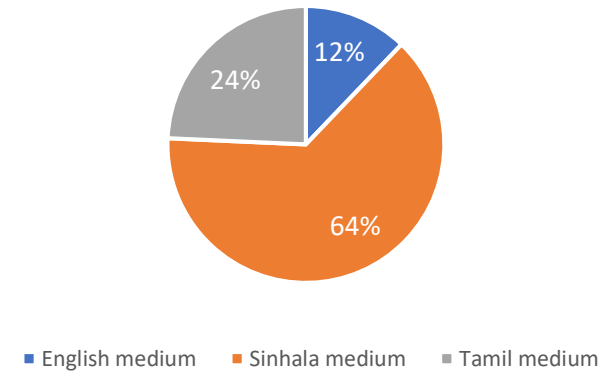
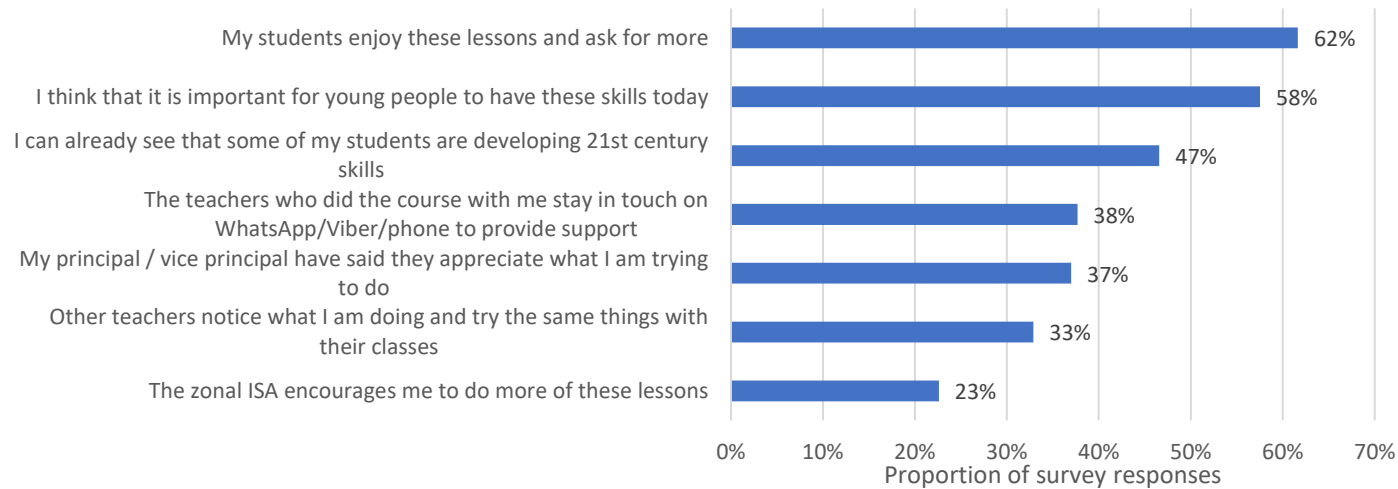


Figure 6: Survey respondents - medium of instruction at school

Motivational Factors



◀ Figure 7: Factors motivating respondents to apply course skills in their classrooms

Survey responses were received from a diverse group of programme participants in terms of previous exposure to British Council supported courses (Figs 1 & 3), RESC attended (Fig. 4), years of teaching experience (Fig. 5), and medium of instruction at school (Fig. 6). This diversity is important as it enables us to draw conclusions about whether the programme is likely to have a similar impact if rolled out to English teachers across the island. Accordingly each finding from the survey has been analysed to establish whether there were statistically significant differences in the finding resulting from any of the above factors. One caveat to the ability to extrapolate findings is that programme participants are generally highly professional individuals prepared to give up their own time in the pursuit of teaching excellence. The extent to which this may make the sample non-representative of English teachers in general needs to be considered in view of feedback from almost all RESC trainers that the programme was over-subscribed with some RESCs coming under considerable pressure from both teachers and school principals to take up additional participants. Hence, while programme participants may not represent all English teachers, it would appear that they represent a large proportion of them.

The reaction of students

A positive reaction from students to changes in the way they were taught English was reported in seven of eleven key informant interviews with RESC trainers. They attributed this to the activities in the textbook being presented in a novel and unexpected way; to students being encouraged to be genuinely creative and to participate actively in lessons and group work; and to students being challenged to think critically. One RESC trainer recounted a teacher sharing with him her 'aha moment' when she realised that she simply had not been giving her students enough time to think critically and the difference it made when she did so. It appears that there were many similar experiences.

'Most of the time as teachers, what they've been doing is like telling them exactly what to do for group work for creativity and imagination. That's not the right thing. Even teachers were saying, "What were we doing?" Because they were giving more marks when the child does the same thing that the teacher tells' (RESC trainer).

'Previously the teachers didn't have the value of doing group work much because they thought it was just time-killing. Earlier it was just the children getting together and doing a poster and maybe one child has done it and the group gets the mark. Now they know how to plan activities for group work and pair work and how to develop collaboration and communication, having criteria, getting the work done by all the children' (RESC trainer).

When survey respondents were asked what motivated them to continue supporting their students to develop 21st century skills, 62% of respondents said that they were motivated by the way that students enjoyed the lessons and ask for more (Fig. 7). There were no significant differences¹ in this finding based on RESC attended, prior course exposure, or years of teaching experience (Table 1).

The students also liked the new teaching approaches that their teachers took back from the course and used in their lessons.

'I think all the activities, warmers, games and tasks which I was learned through this course are really important and useful. Though we faced some challenges in the

¹ Fishers Exact Test was used for this analysis rather than a Chi Squared Test as small sample sizes resulted in cell sizes of less than 5. The independent variable in each case was categorical while the dependent variable (motivating factor) was also categorical indicating the need for a non-parametric test.

schools, I saw that students were enjoyed and loved to participate in the activities. It is pleasure to see that they had improved the skills' (Survey respondent comment).

Table 1: Analysis of impact of possible contributing factors on source of motivation for teachers

Factor analysed	RESC attended ²	Prior Course Exposure ³	Years of Teaching Experience
My students enjoy these lessons and ask for more	P=0.85031	χ^2 (2, N=135)=1.411, P=0.494)	χ^2 (2, N=135)=2.160, P=0.340)
Other teachers notice what I am doing and try the same things with their classes	P=0.40066	χ^2 (2, N=135)=0.204, P=0.903)	χ^2 (2, N=135)=1.515, P=0.469)
My principal / vice principal have said they appreciate what I am trying to do	P=0.7362	χ^2 (2, N=135)=0.560, P=0.756)	χ^2 (2, N=135)=0.176, P=0.916)
The zonal ISA encourages me to do more of these lessons	P=0.15673	χ^2 (2, N=135)=0.723, P=0.697)	χ^2 (2, N=135)=0.830, P=0.660)
The teachers who did the course with me stay in touch on WhatsApp/Viber/phone to provide support	P=0.17665	χ^2 (2, N=135)=4.666, P=0.097)	χ^2 (2, N=135)=0.772, P=0.680)
I can already see that some of my students are developing 21st century skills	P=0.68385	χ^2 (2, N=135)=6.352, P=0.042)*	χ^2 (2, N=135)=1.235, P=0.539)
I think that it is important for young people to have these skills today	P=0.83833	χ^2 (2, N=135)=3.385, P=0.184)	χ^2 (2, N=135)=0.835, P=.653)

* differences are statistically significant

In a strong endorsement of the change in the learner experience, one RESC trainer said,

'Some teachers faced some problems because there was a very big demand in the school for a particular teacher because the students could compare the teachers who have got the training and the teachers who haven't got the training....so the students wanted to join those teacher's class' (RESC trainer).

The reaction of teachers

RESC trainers unanimously agreed that teachers had enjoyed the programme and found it useful and relevant, although trainers at one RESC said that they had had to convince teachers of the importance of some of the skills. In six of eleven key informant interviews, RESC trainers attributed the positive response to teacher realisation that they were not as constrained by the content of the textbook as they previously had thought. According to RESC trainers, programme participants had started introducing pre-, while-, and post- activities to supplement textbook content. Teachers were also reportedly enthusiastic about the guided discovery approach introduced by the course and how the approach could be used to replace more deductive textbook activities, particularly in the teaching of grammar.

'When we introduced the same lessons that they normally do in the classroom in a different manner, they understood that, oh my God, there are different things that we can teach, especially the higher order thinking and learning and all and how can we

² Analysis done with Fisher's Exact Test comparing only five RESCs with the highest number of respondents

³ Categories of 2 courses completed and 3 courses completed were combined for the purposes of this test to avoid small cell counts which would have made the chi-squared analysis invalid

adapt these lessons ...they really enjoyed that because they never thought that they could do that earlier' (RESC trainer).

'This course made me change my teaching methodology. Students are very much benefitted by this method' (Survey respondent comment).

Evaluation question: Did participating teachers complete the programme with an appreciation of the importance of equipping their pupils with 21st century skills?

Many RESC trainers during their interviews made spontaneous comments about the importance of 21st century skills and indicated that programme participants were similarly convinced of the need for their students to develop these skills.

'I believe that the implementation of this 21st century program is very important to Sri Lanka because, when you think about our education system here in Sri Lanka it is something totally based on an exam orientation therefore the students are taught, and also the teachers, that only the input to the page knowledge matters. As an example, you can say, if the students are OK with knowing the text, they can easily pass the examination. We were taught the concept of deep learning. In our education system, so far, we have never thought of those things. Therefore, we have totally neglected some of the elements of the skills so when they leave the school system and they are looking for jobs in the future, they will have trouble. They do not have the necessary skills for the lifelong process. In our system, we always label as the best students, those who are OK with the memorising, but we don't have a lot of collaborative learning or these leadership qualities. There is just no room for that very much. ...These are the important things that need to be developed for their future on the job market and their future life actually' (RESC trainer).

'Teachers understood the importance of the 21st century skills and that these things were lacking in the course book. This is what they most liked about the course.' (RESC trainer).

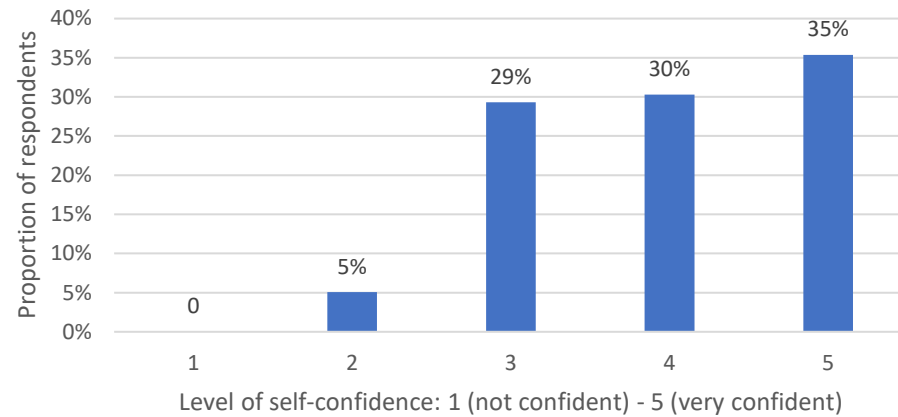
Finally, 58% of survey respondents said that what motivates them to continue to support their students to develop 21st century skills, is the conviction that 'it is important for young people to have these skills today' (Fig. 7).

Evaluation question: Did participating teachers complete the programme with the confidence and ability to nurture the development of 21st century skills in their students?

As well as enjoying the programme and endorsing the importance of what they had learnt, 65% of survey respondents said that they now felt 'confident' or 'very confident' in their ability to support their students to develop 21st century skills (Fig. 8). There were no significant differences⁴ in this finding based on prior course exposure, RESC attended, or years of teaching experience (Table 2).

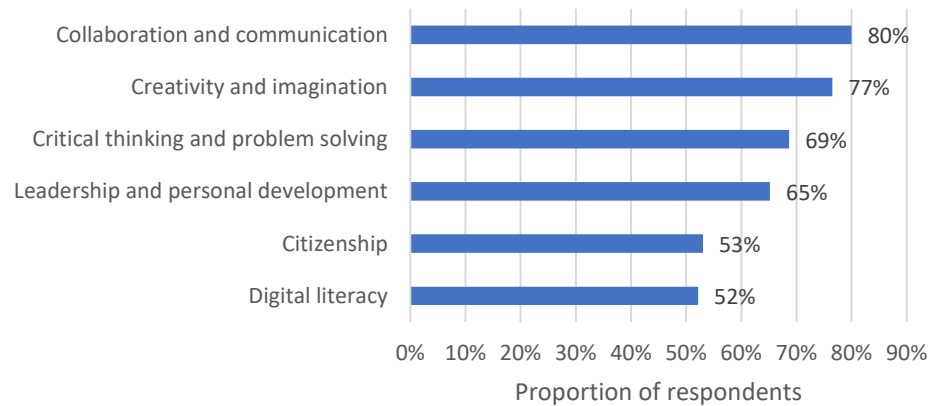
⁴ A Kruskal-Wallis Test was used for this analysis as the independent variables were categorical and the dependent variable (teacher confidence) was ordinal.

Confidence in ability to support students to develop 21st century skills



◀ Figure 8: Survey respondent self-reported confidence in their ability to support their students to develop 21st century skills

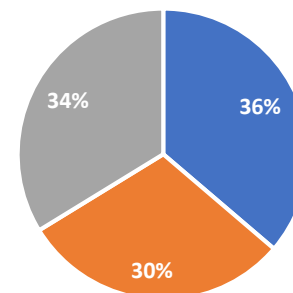
Skills classes conducted by respondents since training



◀ Figure 9: 21st century skills respondents report supporting in their classes since returning to schools

Figure 10: Response to question, "Have you conducted any online classes for your students while schools have been closed?" ►

Incidence of teachers conducting online classes during school closures



■ No, I haven't been able to do this ■ Yes, once or twice ■ Yes, frequently

▼ Figure 11: Breakdown of frequency of online classes by RESC attended

Teachers conducting online classes during school closures by RESC attended

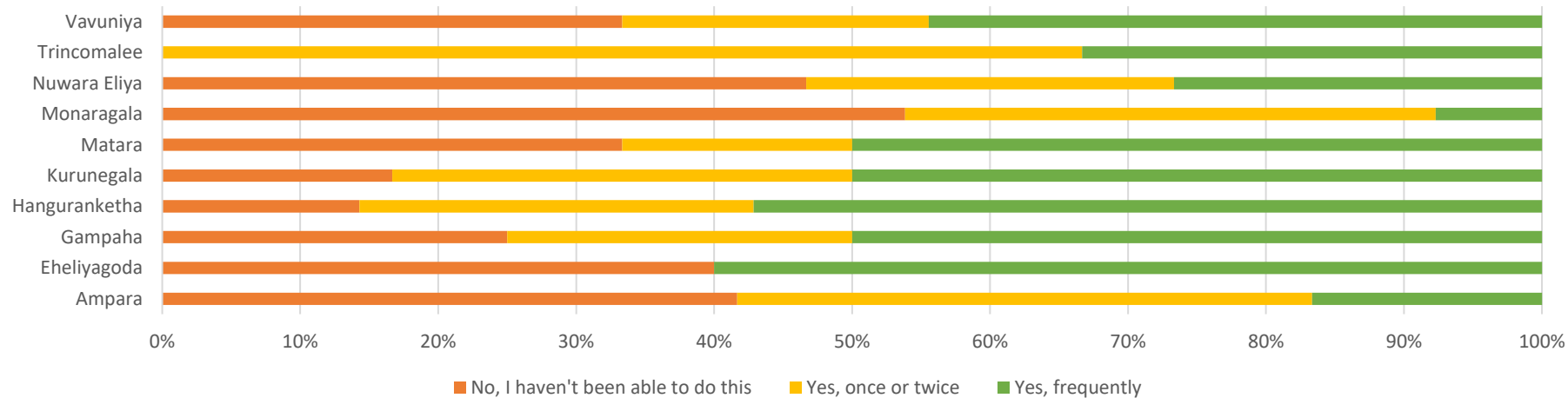


Table 2: Analysis of impact of possible contributing factors on teacher confidence

Factor analysed	Impact on teacher confidence
RESC attended	($H(9)=8.426$, $P=0.492$)
Prior course exposure	($H(3)=2.996$, $P=0.392$)
Years of teaching experience	($H(2)=3.730$, $P=0.155$)

Impact on teaching

Evaluation question: Are there indications that, after returning to their schools, participating teachers are adapting English lessons to support the development of 21st century skills?

More than 60% of survey respondents indicated that they had conducted lessons in their schools to build critical thinking and problem solving, leadership and personal development, creativity and imagination and collaboration and communication skills (Fig. 9) with the latter two skills being taught by more than 70% of survey respondents. However, only around half of survey respondents indicated that they had conducted classes where they sought to build citizenship and digital literacy skills (Fig. 9). There were no significant differences in the extent to which 21st century skills lessons were conducted based on years of teaching experience (Table 3). However, the difference between RESC attended on readiness to conduct digital literacy lessons was statistically significant and reflected provincial levels of device ownership.⁵ Readiness to conduct lessons to build citizenship skills also differed significantly based on RESC attended. Finally, readiness to conduct lessons on leadership and personal development and critical thinking and problem solving differed significantly based on respondents' prior course exposure although, surprisingly, the data shows that teachers who had not previously attended courses were more likely to try to support their students to develop critical thinking skills. There are several factors that appear to explain the differences in teacher readiness to introduce the various skills to their lessons.

Table 3: Impact of teacher profiles on readiness to introduce 21st century skills into classroom teaching.

Factor analysed	RESC attended ⁶	Prior course exposure ⁷	Years of teaching experience
Citizenship	$P=0.03067^*$	$\chi^2 (2, N=135)=0.904$, $P=.636$	$\chi^2 (2, N=135)=0.024$, $P=.988$
Collaboration and communication	$P=0.67066$	$\chi^2 (2, N=135)=2.856$, $P=.240$	$\chi^2 (2, N=135)=0.961$, $P=.618$
Creativity and imagination	$P=0.21204$	$\chi^2 (2, N=135)=4.172$, $P=.124$	$\chi^2 (2, N=135)=0.136$, $P=.934$
Critical thinking and problem solving	$P=0.60078$	$\chi^2 (2, N=135)=8.249$, $P=.016^*$	$\chi^2 (2, N=135)=3.862$, $P=.145$
Digital literacy	$P=0.01369^*$	$\chi^2 (2, N=135)=3.915$, $P=.141$	$\chi^2 (2, N=135)=0.765$, $P=.682$
Leadership and personal development	$P=0.07121$	$\chi^2 (2, N=135)=5.959$, $P=.051^*$	$\chi^2 (2, N=135)=0.459$, $P=.795$

* differences are statistically significant

Firstly, the digital literacy topic was seen as challenging by teachers mainly because of a lack of resources in schools. RESC trainers reported that portfolio tasks in this area were well done and that teachers had indicated to them that they appreciated the emphasis of the unit on online safety. However, while around 50% of schools (mainly national schools and larger schools in urban areas) have computer labs, activity rooms, smart classrooms, and/or language labs, most schools in rural

⁵ Based on Department of Census and Statistics, 2019 data.

⁶ Analysis done with Fisher's Exact Test comparing only five RESCs with the highest number of respondents

⁷ Categories of 2 courses completed and 3 courses completed were combined for the purposes of this test to avoid small cell counts which would have made the chi-squared analysis invalid

areas do not.⁸ Even the majority of the RESCs are not connected to the Internet. Although most teachers have smartphones, students in Sri Lanka are not allowed to bring mobile phones into schools. Moreover, most schools do not offer Wi-Fi connectivity to teachers who are then forced to use their own data plans. 92% of teachers said that the fact that most of their students do not have access to computers or smartphones was ‘somewhat challenging’ or ‘a very big challenge’ for them in developing digital literacy skills (Fig. 22).

While some RESC trainers mentioned that the pandemic and subsequent lockdown had promoted rapid adoption of new technologies with many teachers conducting online classes for their students, it was also true that an urban-rural and socioeconomic digital divide became apparent as a result. Dr. Upali M. Sedera, Education Secretary, has been quoted in the Sunday Times newspaper as saying that only 35-40% of students have Internet connectivity and the equipment to access online materials (Weerasinghe, 2020) and similar levels of access were confirmed by RESC trainers. Teachers employed a range of strategies to reach their students during school closures including asking parents to collect printed materials, sending short assignments and links to online materials/tutorials through WhatsApp and Viber groups, and conducting Zoom classes.

When asked if they had conducted any online classes for their students while schools were closed due to COVID-19, survey respondents were equally likely to say that they had or had not done so (Fig. 10). However, when responses are compared across RESC attended, it becomes apparent that there are regional disparities (Fig. 11). The difference between Hanguranketha, where the zonal education office directed teachers to conduct Zoom classes, and Monaragala, was statistically significant⁹ (Table 4). However, the difference between Monaragala and Gampaha, which is in Western Province where computer ownership rates are almost double that of other provinces,¹⁰ was not (Table 4), indicating that factors other than device ownership and bandwidth availability may be relevant to technology uptake. There was no significant difference in the finding based on prior course exposure or years of teaching experience.

Table 4: Analysis of impact of teacher profile on readiness to conduct online classes during school closures

Factor analysed	Impact on readiness to conduct online classes
Attended Hanguranketha or Monaragala RESC	$p=0.0249^*$
Attended Gampaha or Monaragala RESC	$p=0.182$
Prior course exposure	$p=0.116$
Years of teaching experience	$p=0.514$

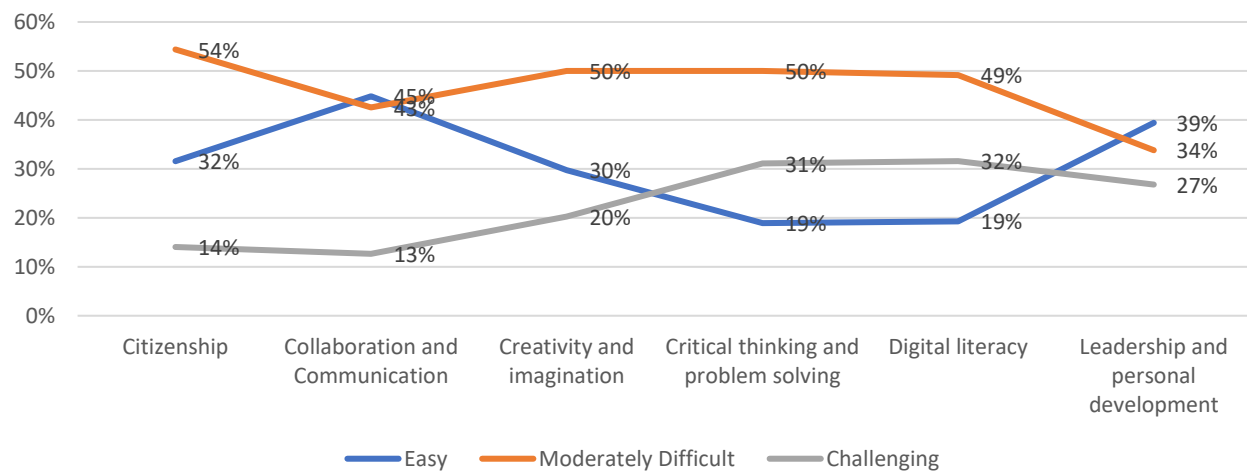
* difference is statistically significant

⁸ ‘Due to the uneven distribution of students within the Sri Lankan education system, the Sri Lankan government has been able to empower almost 90% of the local student population by providing ICT facilities to only 50% of the schools scattered in the nine provinces’ (Sri Lanka Export Development Board 2017, online).

⁹ Fishers Exact Test was used for this analysis rather than a Chi Squared Test as small sample sizes resulted in cell sizes of less than 5. The independent variable in each case was categorical while the dependent variable (motivating factor) was also categorical indicating the need for a non-parametric test

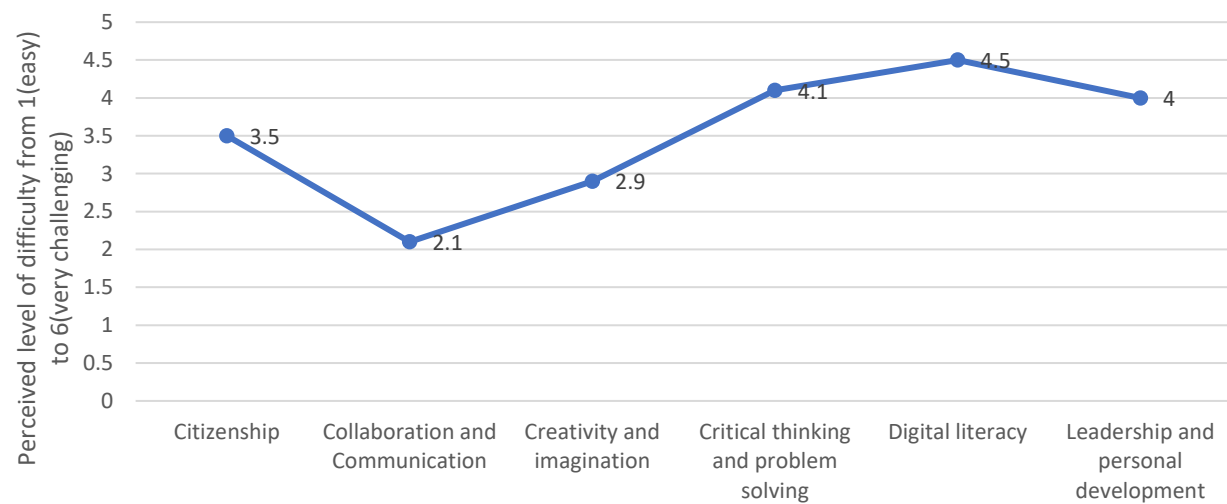
¹⁰ Computer ownership in Western Province is 34.7% compared to Uva Province with a rate of 12.9% (Department of Census and Statistics, 2019). Gampaha RESC is situated in Western Province while the Monaragala RESC is situated in Uva Province.

Ease of adapting textbook content to teach skills



◀ Figure 12: Respondent opinion of ease with which English textbook can be adapted to teach each 21st century skill

Perceived difficulty for students to develop



◀ Figure 13: Respondent perception of level of difficulty students will face in developing each 21st century skill on scale 1 (easy) to 6 (very challenging)

Secondly, teachers found it challenging to adapt the student textbook to teach critical thinking and problem solving skills and digital literacy with most saying that these topics required the use of supplementary materials or needed to be taught independent of the textbook with materials they prepared themselves (Table 5, Fig. 12). This may partly explain the reduced readiness of teachers to conduct lessons to develop these two skills. 54% of teachers also said that they needed to prepare supplementary materials to teach citizenship (Table 5, Fig. 12). However, RESC trainers suggested that another factor may also have been the realisation that supporting students to become good citizens involves working on intangibles like attitudes and empathy.

‘The course changed the teachers' perspective on what is citizenship.... Previously it was just a subject that they had to pass the exam and get the marks.... When it came to the course only, they really understood that this is not a subject to be taught but attitudes to be built up in students. It was an eye-opener for them’ (RESC trainer).

Table 5: Survey respondent perceptions of ease of adapting the English textbook to teaching 21st century skills

	Easy (Topics in the textbook do not require much adaptation)	Moderately Difficult (Requires use of supplementary materials)	Challenging (Usually needs to be taught independent of textbook)
Collaboration and communication	45%	43%	13%
Creativity and imagination	30%	50%	20%
Critical thinking and problem solving	19%	50%	31%
Leadership and personal development	39%	34%	27%
Citizenship	32%	54%	14%
Digital literacy	19%	49%	32%

The perceived ease of adapting the English textbook to support the development of 21st century skills did not differ significantly based on RESC attended, prior course exposure or years of teaching experience (Table 6).

Table 6: Impact of teacher profiles on perceived ease of adapting the English textbook to teaching 21st century skills

Factor analysed	RESC attended	Prior course exposure	Years of teaching experience
Citizenship	(H(9)=4.451, P=0.879)	(H(3)=0.040, P=0.998)	(H(2)=0.912, P=0.634)
Collaboration and communication	(H(9)=2.424, P=0.983)	(H(3)=1.866, P=0.601)	(H(2)=0.126, P=0.939)
Creativity and imagination	(H(9)=10.233, P=0.332)	(H(3)=3.391, P=0.335)	(H(2)=2.694, P=0.260)
Critical thinking and problem solving	(H(9)=7.004, P=0.637)	(H(3)=2.920, P=0.404)	(H(2)=0.578, P=0.749)
Digital literacy	(H(9)=5.446, P=0.794)	(H(3)=4.701, P=0.195)	(H(2)=3.007, P=0.222)
Leadership and personal development	(H(9)=8.821, P=0.454)	(H(3)=0.489, P=0.921)	(H(2)=0.580, P=0.748)

Although RESC trainers recognised the importance of critical thinking and problem-solving skills, this topic was identified as the most challenging for teachers in nine out of eleven key informant interviews with RESC trainers. Two RESCs reported spending more time on this topic than allocated in the programme guidelines as they worked with teachers to build even more examples of how the textbook could be adapted to design a lesson where those skills were enhanced.

‘Critical thinking and problem solving was a kind of a difficult thing because they didn't have a prior habit of asking questions and creating situations that made the students think more critically leading them to high order skills’ (RESC trainer).

RESC trainer estimates of the proportion of teachers completing the course capable of designing and delivering a solid lesson based around the skill of critical thinking and problem solving ranged between 20% and 80%. When asked how difficult they felt each skill would be for their students to develop, survey respondents also rated critical thinking and problem solving, digital literacy and leadership and personal development as the most difficult with citizenship generally considered to be somewhat difficult (Fig. 13). Although the development of leadership and personal development skills was anticipated to be a challenge for students, anecdotal evidence indicated some early success.

‘Before teachers had their favourites and those children were always nominated as the group leaders but now with the Leadership and Personal Development, other students are getting a chance’ (RESC trainer).

The skills of collaboration and communication and creativity and imagination were seen as the least challenging for students since group and pair work were already the norm in most classes and RESC trainers said they had already seen evidence of this in lessons they had observed. In ten out of eleven key informant interviews with RESC trainers, these topics were identified as the easiest for both teachers and students to develop. Nonetheless, it was thought to be easier to develop these skills in rural schools rather than in overcrowded urban schools and one RESC described how teaching to a rigid curriculum over many years had made the topic of creativity and imagination more challenging than anticipated for their teachers,

‘When we went through their portfolios, we understood that this was lacking. Not through any fault of theirs but I think for a long time there were no chances for them to be creative or use their imagination’ (RESC trainer).

‘Nowadays teachers give chances to the students to do something or draw something. Especially for creativity and imagination. Previously teachers would have just given them a short writing task’ (RESC trainer).

One RESC trainer neatly summed up the challenge for teachers by saying that supporting students to develop 21st century skills involves creating an appropriate learning environment rather than teaching content and explained that this is a new skill for teachers.

‘It is interesting because they can't teach 21st century skills...they have to structure the lesson in a way to support them to develop the skill. This is very different to normal teaching’ (RESC trainer).

Teacher perceptions of the level of challenge that developing the various skills is likely to present to their students did not differ significantly between RESC attended (Figs. 14, Table 7), years of teaching experience (Fig. 15, Table 7) or prior course exposure (Table 7) except that respondents

who had completed two or more previous courses were more likely to feel that students would find it difficult to develop critical thinking and problem solving skills (Fig. 16).

Table 7: Impact of teacher profile on perceptions of difficulty for their students to develop the 21st century skills

Factor analysed	RESC attended	Prior course exposure	Years of teaching experience
Citizenship	(H(9)=4.339, P=0.888)	(H(3)=1.639, P=0.650)	(H(2)=0.912, P=0.634)
Collaboration and communication	(H(9)=12.798, P=0.172)	(H(3)=5.887, P=0.117)	(H(2)=0.126, P=0.939)
Creativity and imagination	(H(9)=10.944, P=0.280)	(H(3)=3.576, P=0.311)	(H(2)=2.694, P=0.260)
Critical thinking and problem solving	(H(9)=10.311, P=0.326)	(H(3)=15.043, P=0.002)*	(H(2)=0.578, P=0.749)
Digital literacy	(H(9)=16.113, P=0.065)	(H(3)=4.701, P=0.195)	(H(2)=3.007, P=0.222)
Leadership and personal development	(H(9)=6.749, P=0.663)	(H(3)=0.489, P=0.921)	(H(2)=0.580, P=0.748)

* difference is statistically significant

Classroom monitoring was not a formal part of the NDB Supporting 21st Century Skills programme and there are differences across provinces in the level to which RESC trainers are encouraged to observe English lessons in schools. Hence, in most cases, RESC trainers were unable to substantiate claims made by survey respondents and FGD participants that they were actually putting into practice what they had learnt in the programme. However, in five of eleven key informant interviews, RESC trainers made mention of how others at the school, observing the new approaches to teaching and the positive reaction of students, became interested in following the course. This suggests an impact not just on direct participants and their students but, in many cases, on other teachers at their schools.

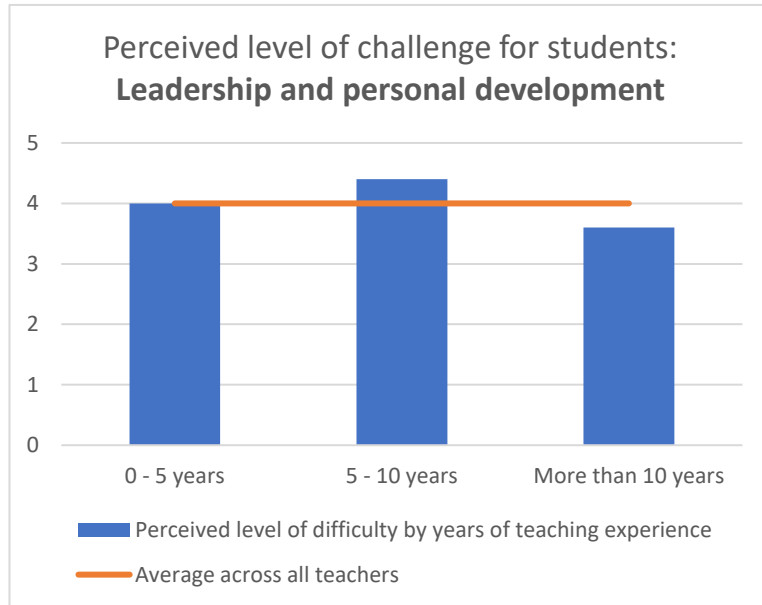
‘Some two principals were forcing us to take their other teachers as well. We had given two opportunities to those school and now they are asking another chance but we couldn't give’ (RESC trainer).

‘Now other subject teachers are thinking how can we adapt these 21st century skills in our subject? ...Everybody knows the job market - it is very risky and challenging nowadays. A person who does not know these ideas will find it hard to find employment’ (RESC trainer).

33% of survey respondents said that having other teachers at their school notice what they are doing and trying the same things with their own classes motivated them to continue supporting their students to develop 21st century skills (Fig. 22). This finding did not differ significantly¹¹ across RESC attended, years of teaching experience or prior course exposure (Table 1).

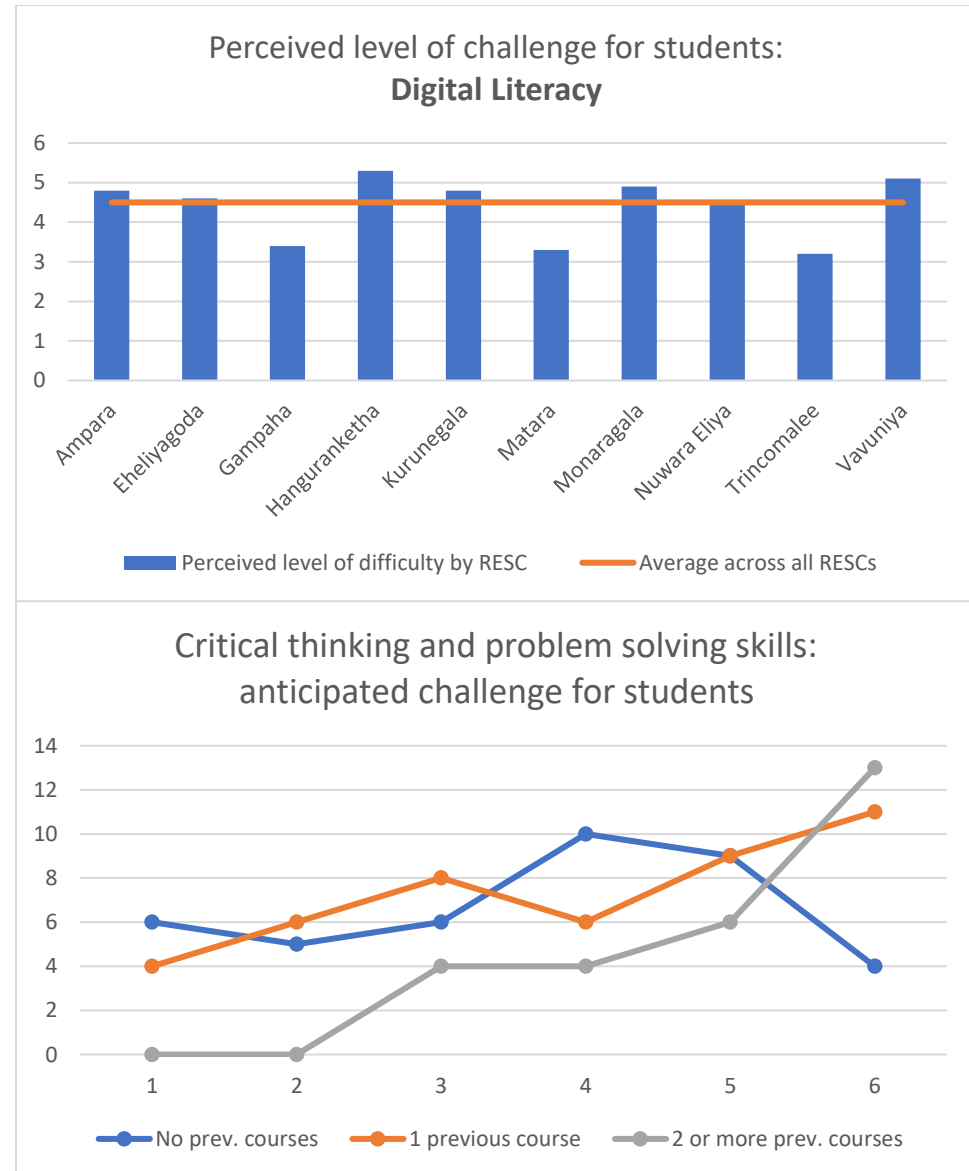
¹¹ Analysis was done with Fisher's Exact Test.

Figure 14: Respondent perception of level of challenge for their students to develop digital literacy against RESC attended ►



▲ Figure 15: Respondent perception of level of challenge for their students to develop Leadership and Personal Development skills against respondent's years of teaching experience

Figure 16: Respondent perception of level of challenge for their students to develop Critical Thinking and Problem-Solving skills against prior course exposure ►



Impact on students

Evaluation question: If participating teachers are adapting English lessons to support the development of 21st century skills, are there early indications of the success of these efforts?

Survey respondents were asked if they could already see any evidence of their students mastering 21st century skills. The most positive responses to this question related to collaboration and communication (55% of respondents said that more than half of their students showed early evidence of having this skill) and creativity and Imagination (39% of respondents) (Table 8, Fig. 17). The least evident were critical thinking and problem-solving skills (16%) and digital literacy (19%) (Table 8, Fig. 17). This is unsurprising given earlier findings that course participants were least likely to conduct classes directed at developing these skills, found it difficult to adapt the exercises in the English textbook for the tasks, and anticipated that their students would find them challenging.

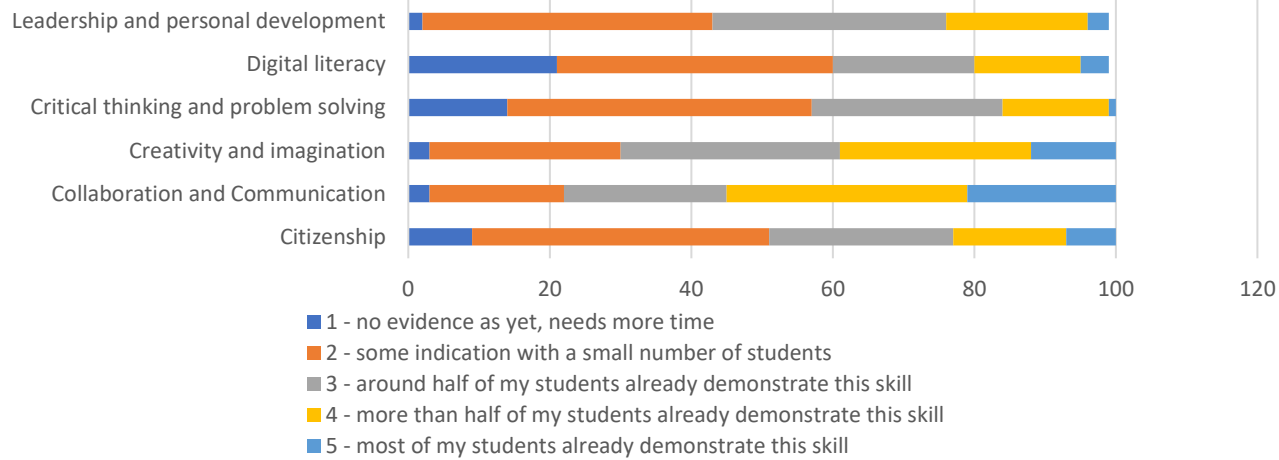
Table 8: Early evidence of student 21st century skills - teacher perceptions.

	Citizenship	Collaboration and Communication	Creativity and imagination	Critical thinking and problem solving	Digital literacy	Leadership and personal development
1- no evidence as yet, needs more time	9%	3%	3%	14%	21%	2%
2 - some indication with a small number of students	42%	19%	27%	43%	39%	41%
3 - around half of my students already demonstrate this skill	26%	23%	31%	27%	20%	33%
4 - more than half of my students already demonstrate this skill	16%	34%	27%	15%	15%	20%
5 - most of my students already demonstrate this skill	7%	21%	12%	1%	4%	3%

When viewed graphically (Fig. 18), there appear to be differences in perceived student collaboration and communication skills related to prior exposure to British Council supported courses although this was not found to be statistically significant ($H(3)=7.673$, $P=0.053$). However, differences between RESCs in perceived student collaboration and communication skills (Fig. 20) were statistically significant ($H(9)=19.673$, $P=0.20$). Post hoc pairwise comparisons¹² revealed the source of difference to be RESCs where program participants were more likely to have previously completed other British Council supported courses (Fig. 3) suggesting that these findings were related.

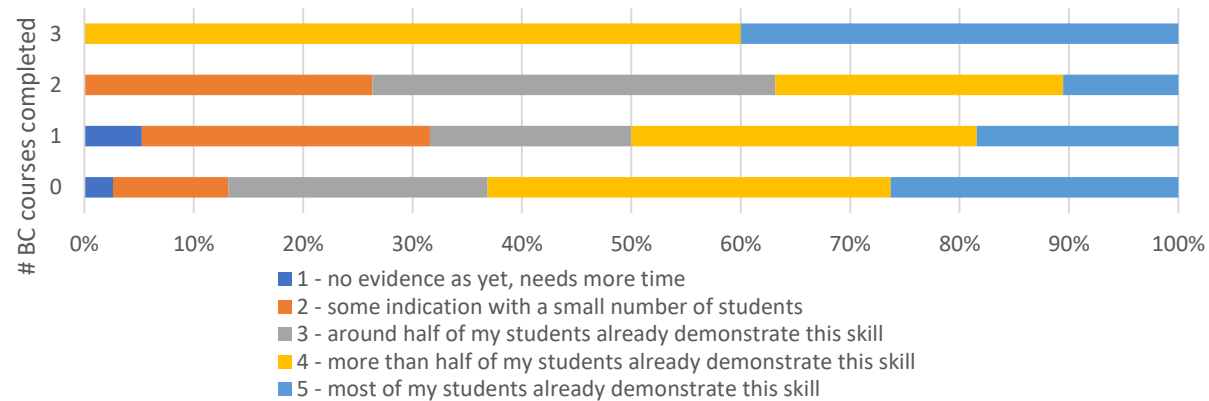
¹² Made with Bonferroni corrections for multiple tests.

Early evidence of 21st century skills in students



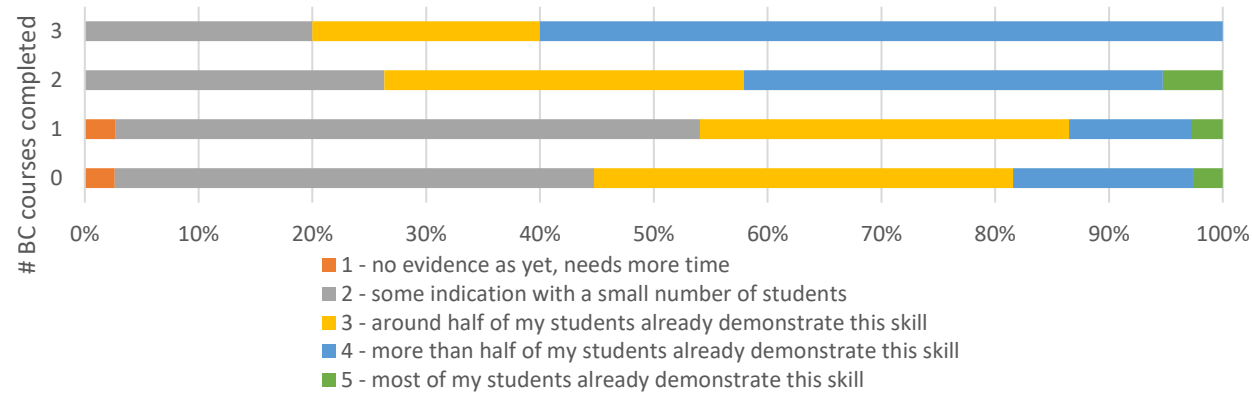
◀ Figure 17: Respondent perceptions of extent to which their students already demonstrate 21st century skills

Early evidence of Collaboration & Communication skills



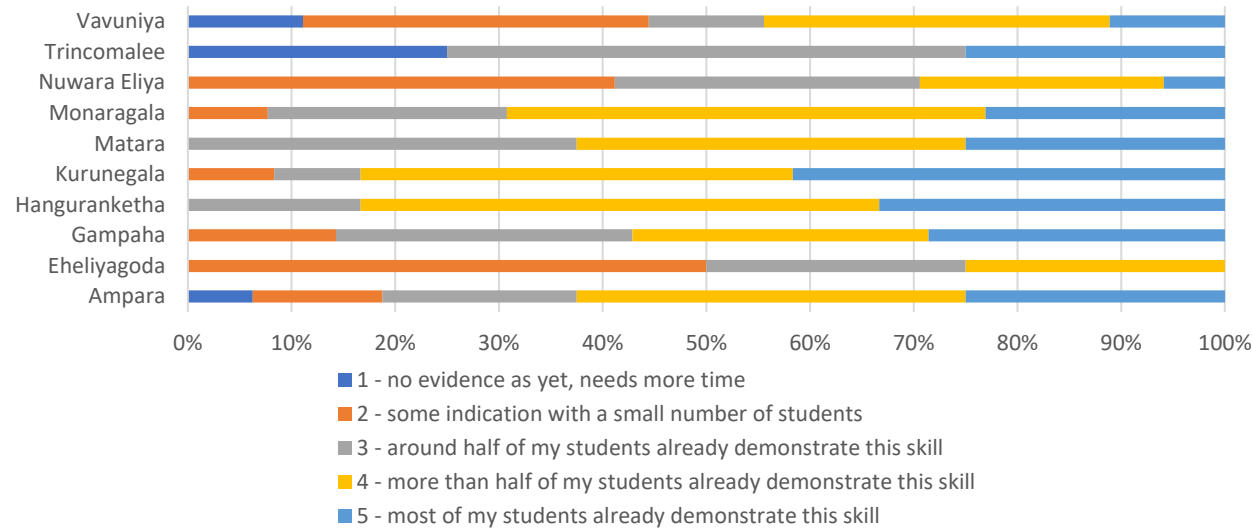
◀ Figure 18: Respondent perceptions of extent to which their students already demonstrate Collaboration and Communication skills against prior course experience of respondents

Early evidence of Leadership & Personal Development skills



◀ Figure 19: Respondent perceptions of extent to which their students already demonstrate Leadership & Personal Development skills against prior course experience of respondents

Early evidence of Collaboration & Communication skills



◀ Figure 20: Respondent perceptions of extent to which their students already demonstrate Collaboration & Communication skills against RESC attended

Differences in perceived Leadership and personal development skills did differ significantly based on the prior exposure of their teachers to British Council supported courses ($H(3)=8.532, P=0.035$) (Fig. 19). However, post hoc pairwise comparisons did not yield a logical pattern of differences suggesting that some other intermediate factor may have been the actual cause.

Younger teachers (0-5 years of teaching experience) were more likely to see evidence of digital literacy in their students ($H(2)=10.329, P=0.006$).

47% of survey respondents identified being able to see that their students are already developing 21st century skills as a source of motivation for them to continue with their work to support skill development. Despite the differences noted above, differences in this factor between respondents trained at different RESC were not statistically significant (Table 1). Teachers who had completed multiple British Council supported courses were more likely to consider this to be a source of motivation (Table 1) but the pattern of the data (Fig. 21) is not conclusive.

Sustainability

The evidence indicates that teachers wishing to support their students in the development of 21st century skills face a lot of challenges. 88% of survey respondents said that 'a lot of my students are so poor in English it is difficult to do these sorts of activities' (Fig. 22). 80% of teachers said they felt that 'the way my students have been taught up until now means that I will have to completely change the way they think and learn' was 'somewhat challenging' or 'a very big challenge' (Fig. 22). While survey and FGD responses indicate that programme participants are overcoming these challenges and beginning to conduct lessons to support their students to develop the skills, for teachers to continue this work is likely to require a strong personal belief in the importance of equipping students with 21st century skills, reinforced by education authorities at all levels.

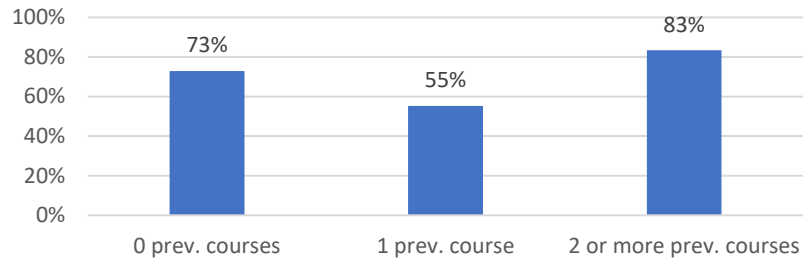
58% of teachers said that they believe that it is important for young people in today's world to have 21st century skills (Fig. 7). Teachers and RESC trainers also cited examples of school principals and senior staff who already appreciate what programme participants are doing in their classrooms and this will become more widespread with time as the Ministry has included 21st century skills in orientation training for newly appointed principals since 2019. However, RESC trainers were unanimous in saying that In-Service Advisers (ISAs) were unaware of 21st century skills and how teachers can best support their students to develop them (although several RESCs had made efforts to brief their zonal ISAs). Given the influence that ISAs have on teaching practice, this is something that needs to be addressed.

'The 21st century skills concept has not gone to the schools yet. Only the teachers who have been trained here, they are familiar and they know. Even if the authorities go there, they never check, or promote or talk about it because they don't know about it. So, we can't say they don't support but they don't know about it' (RESC trainer).

'ISAs are always on the go and busy and even if called, they don't have time to come. And when they go to class, they are using a different format so are interested in different things - not 21st century skills' (RESC trainer).

RESC trainers in six of eleven interviews recommended incorporating classroom monitoring into any future 21st century skills courses to be done either by the RESC trainers themselves or by ISAs and master trainers. They saw this as necessary in order to encourage teachers in the face of factors such as the pressure to cover the syllabus. Their opinion was supported by 79% of survey respondents who said that the crowded curriculum and the limited time available to cover it was either 'somewhat challenging' or 'a very big challenge' for them (Fig. 22).

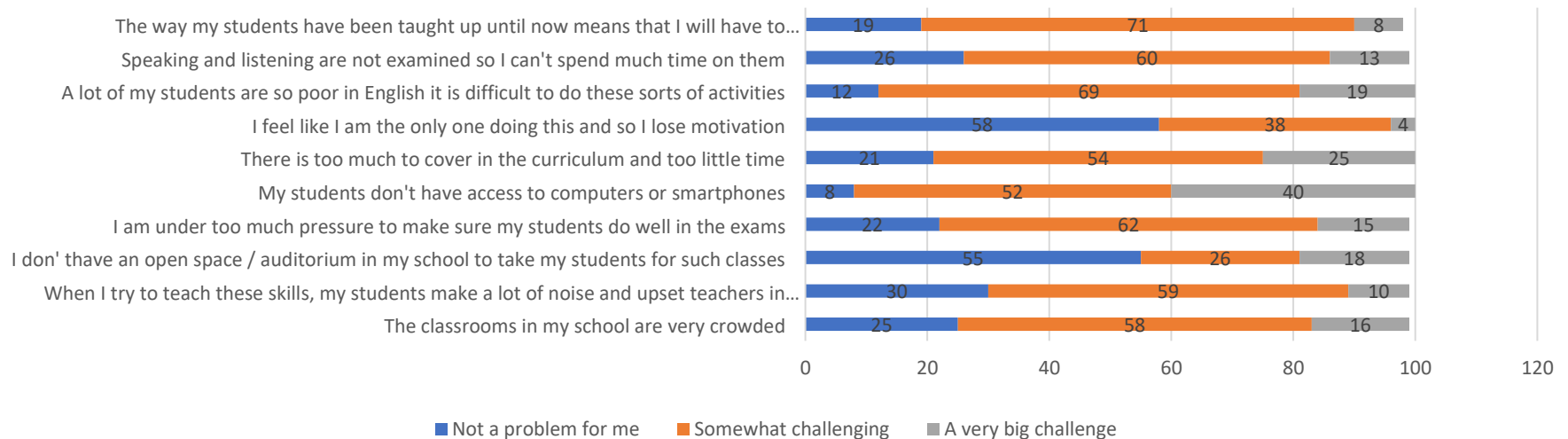
Perception that students are already developing 21st century skills as a source of motivation



◀ Figure 21: Proportion of respondents who cite seeing evidence of 21st century skills in their students as a source of motivation against prior course experience of respondents

▼ Figure 22: Challenges faced by respondents in introducing 21st century skills to lessons in their schools

Challenges faced by teachers



'We did two observations. The teachers use the activities that they learned from the 21st Century work when we go there but then they switch off to finish the syllabus. They're in a hurry and some people, like ISAs, they're very particular about completing the syllabus' (RESC trainer).

Tied to this factor is that of examinations. A system of assessment that does not reinforce the importance of 21st century skills, will naturally work against the sustainability of the early changes in practice documented in this report.

'If they (the ministry) is going to introduce the 21st century skills as part of the new reforms, I believe that they should also change the examination system because if there is an examination and if they have not changed the way that they are going to evaluate them, it should suit the new system, once again the teachers may feel that we should not apply the new methods because it is not examinable' (RESC trainer).

Teachers agreed. 73% of survey respondents agreed with the statement 'speaking and listening are not examined so I can't spend much time on them' and indicated that this was 'somewhat challenging' or 'a very big challenge' for them.

Recommendations

Evaluation question: What can be learned from the implementation of the NDB Supporting 21st Century Skills programme to support the realisation of the government's 'Vistas of Prosperity and Splendour' national policy framework, for education.

A Presidential Task Force (PTF) on Sri Lanka's education affairs was appointed in March 2020. The PTF has produced a framework for reforms under the 'Vistas of Prosperity and Splendour' policy framework entitled 'Re-Imagining Education in Sri Lanka' where they state that 'the national education system must necessarily move beyond its current rigid framework, towards encouraging critical and innovative thinking and the development of 21st century skills and competencies' (PTF 2020, p.1). Although the NDB Supporting 21st Century Skills programme was not conceived as a component of *Re-Imagining Education in Sri Lanka*, it is strongly aligned with the vision put forward in that document. This is apparent in statements such as,

'Reforms must necessarily ensure access to an education that is reflective of current and evolving industry needs, and inculcate curiosity, creativity, critical thinking and empathy in students' (PTF 2020, p.2).

'While we have long prided ourselves on high literacy, we must look beyond the basics. Moving away from a focus on rote learning and rigid curricula towards encouraging critical and analytical thinking and skills required in today's labour market, such as digital and financial literacy, is critical' (PTF 2020, p.3).

In view of this alignment, the recommendations made here apply lessons learned from the implementation of the NDB Supporting 21st Century Skills programme to suggest measures that can be taken to realise the vision of *Re-Imagining Education in Sri Lanka*.

The first recommendation is to **extend the opportunity to all English teachers to experience the equivalent of the NDB Supporting 21st Century Skills training**. Some RESCs reported that they are, in fact, already working on this in their own small way, offering similar training to additional English teachers and teachers in Pirivana schools.

‘I think that it is good, without waiting until the reforms come, if they can start it now, at least taking one topic at a time, so that the teachers will be ready when the reforms come. We have trained some teachers. If they don't get a good backup, they might forget about it. If nobody talks about it, they mightn't feel the importance. The necessity is there in the society, although we don't talk about it, it is there. Now teachers always think about giving knowledge...only that...and preparing children for their exams...But the exam is only a small part of their future. It is high time that everybody realised that and emphasised that and talked about it’ (RESC trainer).

RESC trainers were confident that, having completed the programme, most participating teachers were capable of adapting and conducting English lessons to support their students to develop the six targeted skills. Teachers who had followed previous British Council supported courses were slightly more likely to report signs of early impact but, conversely, teachers for whom this was a first course, were more likely to have attempted building the critical thinking and problem solving skills of their students whereas their more experience colleagues were more likely to anticipate that this skill would be difficult for their students to develop. Younger teachers (with 0-5 years of teaching experience) were also more likely to report evidence of digital literacy in their students. However, it is important to note that 65% of survey respondents confirmed that they felt confident to support their students to develop 21st century skills. This was regardless of whether they had more than ten years of teaching experience or less than five or whether or not they had had prior exposure to British Council supported courses. Ultimately this indicates a strong potential to be able to roll out a similar programme across all English teachers in Sri Lanka although there can be expected to be some differences in uptake.

It was evident that changing teachers’ attitudes and equipping them with the required skills was not easy (Fig. 22). In four out of eleven key informant interviews, RESC trainers commented on the fact that the skills and approaches they were training teachers in were very different to those that have formed the basis of previous training, and new even for the RESC trainers themselves. They spoke of having to spend a lot of time preparing for the face-to-face sessions and, in some cases, extending contact time with participants beyond that allocated in the guidelines. Nonetheless, there were no significant differences based on RESC on teacher self-reported confidence in their ability to apply their learning to their own lessons. Significant differences did appear in the readiness of programme participants to conduct lessons to develop citizenship skills on return to their schools which may indicate different levels of emphasis on this topic between different RESCs. There were also significant geographical differences in teacher readiness to conduct lessons to build digital literacy broadly based on patterns of computer ownership and connectivity. Essentially, these findings indicate a strong potential to expand the scope of the training by bringing on board new trainers but highlights the impact that regional variations in levels of device ownership and school ICT resources may have, regardless of how well trainers are prepared.

However, it is evident that the current RESC training model will not be suitable for a large-scale rollout. Because RESCs have to offer training after school or on weekends and often serve a geographically dispersed catchment area, they find it difficult to recruit participants from distant schools. One of the RESCs was unable to continue the programme beyond phase 2 for this reason. Other RESCs reported related attendance issues. One RESC suggested that the programme would be better run as a series of one-day workshops with time in between to work on portfolios.

The second recommendation is to **train In-Service Advisors (ISAs) and Assistant Directors of English (ADs)** in supporting 21st century skills training so that a consistent and strong message about the

importance of developing these skills reaches all teachers. Parallel to this, there would need to be a revision of the checklist used by ISAs and supervision teams in their lesson observations.

Regardless of prior course exposure or years of teaching experience, the majority of course participants felt that it was ‘moderately difficult’ or ‘challenging’ to adapt activities in the textbook to support the development of 21st century skills. This was the case for all skills although less so for the skills of collaboration and communication and leadership and personal development (Fig. 12). While the majority of survey respondents report conducting 21st century skills lessons with their students (Fig. 9), the parallel patterns of frequency with which the different skills are targeted (Fig. 9) and the perceived difficulty of adapting textbook activities to teach the different skills (Fig. 12), does suggest that **revision of the textbook and/or the provision of substantial supplementary materials in a teacher’s guide**, would support a stronger rollout of lessons directed at developing 21st century skills in schools.

RESC trainers observed that examinations that remain focused on rote learned content will remain an obstacle to change. Survey respondents also identified the crowded curriculum and emphasis of examinations on reading and writing as constraints to spending time to support their students develop 21st century skills. Hence a further recommendation is to **update examinations**. *Re-Imagining Education in Sri Lanka* recognises the importance of this. In its sector-specific recommendations for general education, it targets ensuring ‘that student assessments target critical thinking and analytical skills, vs. rote learning’ (PTF 2020, p.10). The intention is to do this by placing ‘less weightage on final, summative examinations and ensure increased emphasis on formative, potentially project-based assignments that evaluate critical thinking, analytical skills and other competencies throughout the year’ (PTF 2020, p 9). If project-based assignments are adopted, students across the island will need to have excellent collaboration and communication skills. While the majority of survey respondents anticipated that these skills would be relatively easier for their students to develop (Fig. 13), comments that suggested group work, as commonly practiced in schools today, does not promote true collaboration, should be borne in mind. It is encouraging that teachers said that the NDB Supporting 21st Century Skills programme, changed the way they approached group work.

Re-Imagining Education in Sri Lanka promotes using a ‘blended learning’ approach and adopting a ‘flipped classroom’ model. While these concepts are undoubtedly desirable in the ‘new normal’¹³, this evaluation suggests that they may well be the most challenging to implement. The emphasis on online safety within the digital literacy topic of the NDB Supporting 21st Century Skills programme was appreciated by teachers and RESC trainers alike and should, arguably, be the foundation of any move towards these goals. However, the general consensus was that it would be difficult to adapt textbook activities to develop digital literacy and difficult for many schools to provide the resources required for students to develop digital literacy through accessing online learning resources either at school or at home. While COVID was a great technology accelerator in Sri Lanka for both teachers and students alike, the study findings also indicate that the experience highlighted the risk of exacerbating the urban-rural and socio-economic digital divide in the country if digital literacy goals are pursued in an under-resourced fashion. In view of this, it is good to see that the medium-term goal (2020-2023) of *Re-Imagining Education in Sri Lanka* is to **‘ensure all students have access to devices and Internet connections’** (PTF 2020, p.5).

¹³ Reference is made to the anticipated need to avoid over-crowded classrooms and maintain social distancing in schools and other public institutions to avoid the situations that allowed the rapid spread of COVID-19.

References

Department of Census and Statistics (2019), *Computer Literacy Statistics – 2019 (first six months)*, Accessed at <http://www.statistics.gov.lk/PressReleases/ComputerLiteracystatistics-2019-Firstsixmonths>, 18/01/2021.

Presidential Task Force (2020): *Re-Imagining Education in Sri Lanka - summary report*, Presidential Task Force on Sri Lanka's Education Affairs, September 2020, Accessed <http://nec.gov.lk/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/6.Re-imagining-Education-Sri-Lanka-Summary-Report-by-Presidential-Task-Force.pdf>, 16/01/2021

Sri Lanka Export Development Board (2017), *ICT Education in Sri Lanka*, Accessed at <https://www.srilankabusiness.com/blog/ict-education-in-sri-lanka.html>, 18/01/2021.

Weerasinghe, T (2020), *Time tables for TV lessons released; Lessons to be uploaded online as well*, The Sunday Times, November 15, 2020.

Annex A: Survey sent to early phase participants

Supporting 21st Century Skills

The British Council and the National Development Bank (NDB) are committed to working with English teachers to offer the highest quality education possible to young Sri Lankans. Hence, we are eager to learn about your experience of implementing 21st century skills training in your school. Please take a moment to complete this survey. Your response is anonymous, but we collect some general background data to allow us to make generalisations based on the profiles of respondents.

1. For those of you who haven't completed a Survey Monkey survey before, we have prepared a short guide to show you how to answer all the different types of questions. Would you like to read the guide now?

- ☐ Yes please. Take me to the guide.
- ☐ No thanks. I'm already an expert.

Supporting 21st Century Skills

How to answer Survey Monkey questions

There are five types of questions that you will meet in this survey. Let's have a look at how to answer them.

1. You may be asked for a comment or to describe something. It may appear that the box provided for your comment is not large enough for what you would like to type. Simply click on the bottom right corner of the box (circled in the picture below) and drag to make the box larger.



2. You may be asked to tick boxes or circles to select your answer to a question. If the answer options are shown with boxes, you can select more than one. If the answer options are shown with circles you may only select one option. Clicking in the box or circle causes a tick to appear.

4. Rate your agreement with the statements below

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
statement 1	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
statement 2	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
statement 3	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

* 1. The question.

☒ answer option 1

☐ answer option 2

☒ answer option 3

In the example above, there is an asterisk next to the question number. This indicates that you are required to answer the question. If you do not answer the question, the survey will not proceed to the next page and you will see a message like the one below.

 This question requires an answer.

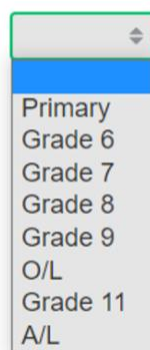
* 1. The question.

3. You may see an answer box with arrow heads like you can see in the picture on the left. Clicking on the arrow heads will bring up a dropdown list like you can see in the picture on the right. You can click to select one option from the list. This becomes your answer to the question.

9. Grade level lesson taught to:



9. Grade level lesson taught to:



section in textbook (i

4. Finally, you may be asked to 'drag' some answer options into a particular order. You can do that by clicking on the option and dragging it to the new position. If that is difficult, it is also possible to change the number on the left to the order position you would like to move it to. For instance, if you change the number '1' in the picture below to '4', 'statement 2' will move to the bottom position as soon as you click next to move to the next page.

3. Drag these statements into the correct order

1	statement 1
2	statement 2
3	statement 3
4	statement 4

3. Drag these statements into the correct order

1	statement 1
2	statement 2
3	statement 3
4	statement 4

3. Drag these statements into the correct order

1	statement 1
2	statement 4
3	statement 3
4	statement 2

OK

That's all you need to know. Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey.

Supporting 21st Century Skills

Respondent profile

2. Have you previously done any of these courses developed by the British Council?

- ☐ NDB English for Teachers
- ☐ CBB Teacher Training Project (TKT)
- ☐ iTESL Professional Development Course for English Language Teachers
- ☐ I haven't done any of these courses

* 3. When did you start the NDB Supporting 21st Century Skills course?

Month :

Year :

* 4. Which RESC conducted the course for your batch?

* 5. How many years have you been teaching English for?

- ☐ 0 - 5 years
- ☐ 5 - 10 years
- ☐ More than 10 years

* 6. What is the medium of instruction in your school / section of school?

☐ English medium

☐ Sinhala medium

☐ Tamil medium

Supporting 21st Century Skills

Your experience to date

* 7. Which of these 21st century skills have you worked on with your students?

☐ Citizenship

☐ Critical thinking and problem solving

☐ Collaboration and communication

☐ Digital literacy

☐ Creativity and imagination

☐ Leadership and personal development

In this section, we ask you to briefly describe a lesson you have taught to develop your students' 21st century skills.

8. Which 21st century skill(s) did you aim to develop in the lesson?

☐ Citizenship

☐ Critical thinking and problem solving

☐ Collaboration and communication

☐ Digital literacy

☐ Creativity and imagination

☐ Leadership and personal development

9. Grade level lesson taught to:

10. Related section in textbook (if applicable):

11. Briefly describe the lesson mentioning the topic of the lesson and how the activities in the lesson helped the students to develop the skill.

Supporting 21st Century Skills

Your feedback

12. In your experience, how easy is it to adapt lessons in the English pupil's book to teach these skills?

	Easy (Topics in the textbook do not require much adaptation)	Moderately Difficult (Requires use of supplementary materials)	Challenging (Usually needs to be taught independent of textbook)
Citizenship	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Collaboration and communication	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Creativity and imagination	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Critical thinking and problem solving	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Digital literacy	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Leadership and personal development	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

13. Drag these 21st century skills to put them in order from 'easiest for students to develop' (at the top) to 'most difficult for students to develop' (at the bottom).

 	Citizenship
 	Collaboration and communication
 	Creativity and imagination
 	Critical thinking and problem solving
 	Digital literacy
 	Leadership and personal development

14. Have you taught any lessons to develop Digital Literacy skills?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Supporting 21st Century Skills

Digital literacy

15. As a result of COVID-19 causing school closures, many students are learning online, making digital literacy an important skill. Briefly describe any classes that you have run to train your students in **online safety** and **digital literacy**.

16. Have you been conducting any online classes for your students while schools have been closed due to COVID-19?

- ☐ Yes, frequently
- ☐ Yes, once or twice
- ☐ No, I haven't been able to do this

Supporting 21st Century Skills

...almost finished!

17. If you have conducted online classes for your students during COVID-19 school closures, what proportion of your students were able to participate in the online classes?

- ☐ Less than a half of them
- ☐ More than a half
- ☐ Almost all of them

18. Apart from the skills themselves, the *Supporting 21st Century Skills* introduced you to some new warmers, games and teaching activities. List any that you have been able to use in your classes.

1.
2.
3.

19. There are many factors that can motivate us to continue working to support our students to develop 21st century skills. Every situation is different. Please select which (if any) of these statements that are true for you in your school.

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> My students enjoy these lessons and ask for more | <input type="checkbox"/> The teachers who did the course with me stay in touch on WhatsApp/Viber/phone to provide support |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other teachers notice what I am doing and try the same things with their classes | <input type="checkbox"/> I can already see that some of my students are developing 21st century skills |
| <input type="checkbox"/> My principal / vice principal have said they appreciate what I am trying to do | <input type="checkbox"/> I think that it is important for young people to have these skills today |
| <input type="checkbox"/> The zonal ISA encourages me to do more of these lessons | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify) | |

20. Teachers trying to help their students develop 21st century skills face many challenges. Select the appropriate response to indicate the situation for you in your school.

	Not a problem for me	Somewhat challenging	A very big challenge
The classrooms in my school are very crowded	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
When I try to teach these skills, my students make a lot of noise and upset teachers in nearby classrooms	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I don't have an open space / auditorium in my school to take my students for such classes	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am under too much pressure to make sure my students do well in the exams	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My students don't have access to computers or smartphones	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
There is too much to cover in the curriculum and too little time	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel like I am the only one doing this and so I lose motivation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
A lot of my students are so poor in English it is difficult to do these sorts of activities	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Speaking and listening are not examined so I can't spend much time on them	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The way my students have been taught up until now means that I will have to completely change the way they think and learn	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other (please specify)			

Survey

21. Which 21st century skills, if any, are you already seeing in your students?

	1 - no evidence as yet, needs more time	2 - some indication with a small number of students	3 - around half of my students already demonstrate this skill	4 - more than half of my students already demonstrate this skill	5 - most of my students already demonstrate this skill
Citizenship	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Collabortion and communication	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Creativity and imagination	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Critical thinking and problem solving	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Digital literacy	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Leadership and personal development	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

22. Drag the marker on the slider bar below to show how confident you feel now about your ability to support your students to develop 21st century skills

0 - completely lacking in confidence
3 - somewhat confident
5 - very confident

23. Do you have any other comments you would like to make?

Thank you for your time in sharing your experience of supporting your students to develop 21st century skills and completing this survey.

The Supporting 21st Century Skills programme aimed to equip secondary English teachers to be able to adapt their teaching and the activities in the English textbook to support their students to develop six key 21st century skills. The programme was sponsored by the National Development Bank (NDB) and implemented by the British Council in collaboration with the Sri Lankan Ministry of Education. The training was conducted by 10 Regional English Support Centres (RESCs) across Sri Lanka. This report is based on an early impact evaluation of the programme.

The evaluation found that training was successful in opening up new possibilities in teaching approaches and largely successful in achieving the desired outcomes. Challenges to being able to support students to develop 21st century skills were identified including the textbook, the examination system, and a lack of digital resources in rural schools.

The aims of the Supporting 21st Century Skills programme and the government's 'Re-imagining Education in Sri Lanka' roadmap are complementary. Hence, it is hoped that the lessons learned from the evaluation of this pilot will be invaluable in supporting the rollout of the 'Re-Imagining' framework.