

## Discourse Process and Discursive Practices in the Profession of Quantity Surveying in Sri Lanka

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**Abstract:** The discourse on profession of quantity surveying exhibits a multi-dimensional role in the construction industry. The defined vital role entails the significance of mounting the scope in contrary to the traditional role with stressing the contribution provided by quantity surveyors through the means of discourse process and associated power relations. Consequently, the present research aims at examining the discourse process and discursive practices allied in profession of quantity surveying in Sri Lanka. In the process, the study has adapted a qualitative research approach while proceeding on data collection through unstructured interviews focusing on 15 number of construction professionals at top- level management, bottom level management as well as quantity surveyors distinctly. The findings obtained by the profound content analysis concise a vast use of English language among quantity surveyors and top-level management and consequently the evaluation of discourse on profession of quantity surveying has discovered a considerable influence on the profession caused by use of English language as a verbal communication tool in being creating power relations in the hierarchy of the construction organizations in Sri Lanka. Hence, the research emphasizes the need of enhancing the scope of this profession in being a mediator of discourse with improving the proficiencies of English language and communication to address the defined gaps.

**Keywords:** Discourse process, Power relations, Quantity Surveying, Sri Lanka.

### Introduction

The construction sector is one of the most energetic and receptive fields in that stimulates the economic growth in a state (Giang, D.T. and Pheng, L.S, 2011). The historic advancement of the construction industry in Sri Lanka has conveyed political as well as economic changes during both pre and post economic liberalization periods (Weddikara and Devapriya,2015). Consequently, the

professions integrated in the industry in general have also affected. The roles of the professions involved in the construction industry, and of quantity surveyors in particular, are also addressing the changes (Ofori and Toor,

2009). Quantity Surveyor was known to offer reactive cost advice that includes cost planning, procurement advice, contract administration and settlement of contractual claims to the client, however, nowadays, the role of Quantity Surveyor has progressed to convert more proactive that has to provide improved value of services to meet customer's desires (Ashworth 2013).

The discourse on profession of quantity surveying exhibits the necessity of a wider scope in its profession in the modern era in contrary to the traditional role. The study conducted by Harun and Torrance in 2006 advocates that quantity surveyors should not contain themselves within the traditional boundaries of cost management. The findings further demonstrate that the quantity surveyors are required to advance their role in new niches, cultivate new knowledge and break into new zones in order to boost their competitiveness. The quantity surveyors are essential to transfer

from being 'thermometer' (reader of temperature) to being a thermostat' (controller of event) in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Ajanlekoko, 2012). Consequently, the profession. The literature on quantity surveying skill and competence illustrates a multiplicity of perspectives (Dada, J.O, *et al.*, 2012).

In emphasizing the need of reforming, developing and implementing by the Quantity Surveyors, the Pacific Association of Quantity Surveyors (PAQS) has introduced eight key skills in the year of 2001, as they even comply with Sri Lankan context. Consequently, communication skill was a major among the interpreted number of skills with emphasizing the need in empowering discourse on profession of quantity surveying. The quantity surveying competencies lie in the financial and contractual control of the building project as well as the development of soft skills (Leveson, 1996). The research conducted by Hasbullah S., et ; al, on Soft Skills Competencies of Quantity Surveying professionals in 2014, emphasizes communication as one of the important prerequisites for quantity surveyors in order to utilize the best. The study infers that it is significant to have the abilities in communicating several languages at any scopes, presenting thoughts and information in written as well as verbally and practicing listening with responding. Hence, this study being one of the initial studies with regard to collaborative professional communication in field quantity surveying in Sri Lanka intends to investigate the discourse process and discursive practices among quantity surveying professionals who interact interlingually for strategic communication purposes namely for managing construction projects across multiple actors in a project that includes contractors, sub-contractors, clients and various professionals.

### **Problem Statement**

The discourse process and discursive practices in the profession of quantity surveying entails a multi-dimensional role with multiple actors involved. The

the discourse on optimism career suggests enhancing multiplicity perspectives into

construction organizations in Sri Lanka are structured in a hierarchical configuration in common which requires a series of communication events in different strata. A large amount of information generated at the top level of the organization will not reach its anticipated destination because each level within a hierarchy will act as a filter, preventing and distorting information flow as it passes down and up to the next levels (Smith et al, 1997). Hence, this study intends to examine the discourse process and discursive practices in the quantity surveying career in Sri Lankan context and its subsequent impact towards the profession.

### **Objectives**

1. To examine the nature of communication in construction organizations in Sri Lanka.
2. To identify the present discourse process & discursive practices in profession of quantity surveying in Sri Lanka.
3. To evaluate the pros and cons in the discourse process and its subsequent impact.
4. To forecast the learning experiences to enhance the discursive competence of the Quantity Surveying Career in Sri Lanka.

### **Significance of the Study**

The studies on discourse exposed by the researchers' long ages back have found that the discourse is an indication of social conversation. The discipline of discourse studies emphasizes that discursive social interaction can reveal language use and thought, and that real-life, naturally-occurring discourse as language use, communication and interaction in social context can provide insights about the manifestations, enactments and reproduction of such phenomena

as group relations, organizations, institutions, processes, routines and structures (van Dijk, 1997).

Although the previous studies were focused on the theories and concepts of discourse studies and profession of quantity surveying distinctly, no study has surveyed the impact of discourses of integration and communication in construction organizations and associated effects towards the profession of Quantity Surveying in Sri Lanka. Hence, the present study becomes significant as it emphasizes the impact of communication towards the profession of quantity surveying within the Sri Lankan perspective.

## Literature Review

### *Discourse*

The interpretation of McArthur in 1996 explicates that, etymologically, the term 'discourse' dates back to the 14<sup>th</sup> century where it has been formed by the Latin term '*discursus*' which means a '*conversation*'. Although the term 'discourse' is defined as 'a serious speech or piece of writing on a particular subject' in the Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (2001), the identical term has diverse interpretations in being a social dialogue. Hence, it is considered that the term 'discourse' can be illuminated by the means of different themes. The findings of Carter in 1993 clarifies the term of 'discourse' in major two forms as a reference on topics or languages used in certain frameworks and as a state of written and spoken contexts. As these majors became criticized by several scholars as not well defined, Nuan in 1993 demonstrates that these majors are sometimes used interchangeably and, in many instances, treated differently. The larger units such as paragraphs, conversations and interviews all seem to fall under the rubric of 'discourse' since they are linguistic performances complete in themselves (Touria Drid, 2010).

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naturally-occurring discourse as language use, communication and interaction in social context can provide insights about the manifestations, enactments and reproduction of such phenomena as group relations, organizations, institutions, processes, routines and structures (van Dijk, 1997). In drawing considerations into a wider scope, the study conducted by James Paul in 1991, interprets social languages in term of a tool in addressing the role of language in discourse as "I will use the term "social languages" to talk about the role of language in discourses. But as I said, Discourses always involve more than language" with emphasizing the mean of discourse in a greater extend rather than being just a language.

A more general use of the word 'discourse' has been made to study the broader functional uses of language in social contexts, and the purpose is to come to understand how the language we use is based on the social environments in which we use that language. (Scollon and Scollon 2001).

The analysis by Norman Fairclough in 1989 provides a greater explanation on the perspective of discourse. Consequently, discourses are specified as social conditions of productions and social conditions of interpretation. The author has stressed major levels of social conditions as social situation, social institution and society as a whole. Hence, the following model illustrate the range of discourse in being texts, interactions and contexts. Accordingly, the current research points the discourse process in profession of quantity surveying with prioritizing the discourses that the quantity surveyors are associated with in being a part of the communication process within construction organizations in Sri Lanka.

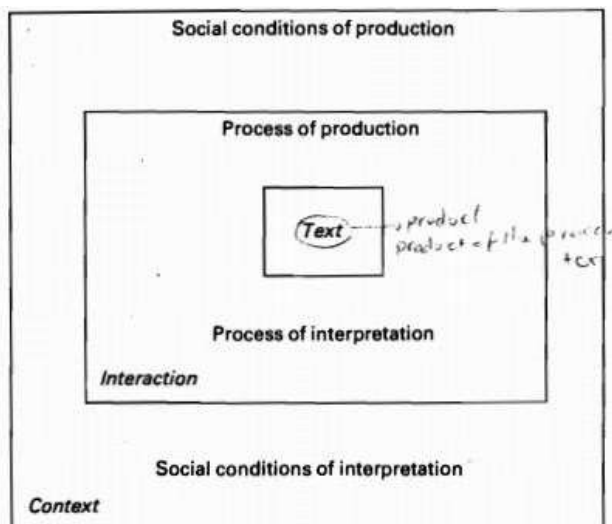


Fig.01: Discourse as text, interaction and content.

### **Work Place Discourse of Quantity Surveying**

In considering the discourse on mandatory key competencies of a quantity surveyor, numerous research studies have discovered the requirement of communication and the use of language as a necessity. The publication on competencies of quantity surveyors required for Assessment of Professional Competence by RICS (2009 and 2012) has evidently designated communication as a leading principle to consider specifically through the areas of construction technology, environmental services and contract administration. In addressing hybridization of communication in context of organizations, Sarangi and Roberts (1999) advocates the need of professionals to display at least three distinguishable but overlapping identities in the profession. The identities are defined by the authors as professional identity, institutional identity and interpersonal identity. The study conducted by Shafie, H., et al., (2014) revealed a specific gap in communication and interpersonal skills exhibited by the quantity surveyors in between the expected skills and the possessed skills by them. The study further emphasized the significance of adaption of communicational skills into the profession of quantity surveying.

### **Communication and Language**

“The conception of language we need for critical language study is discourse, language as social practice determined by social structures” (Norman Fairclough,

1989). Language is a foremost means of communication, and communication almost always take place within some sort of social context by where the effective communication requires an understanding and recognition of the connections between a language and the people who use it (Amberg and Vause, 2009). Ineffective communication has been identified as a problem that can lead to conflict and subsequent litigation (Emmitt and Gorse, 2003). Quantity surveyors in being in the middle point of organizational hierarchy with relating both upper and bottom levels, and as construction professionals are influenced by the custom of language by the means of communication. Interaction between construction professionals will, to a greater or lesser extent, be independent on the language and codes used and how they are received and interpreted (Emmitt and Gorse, 2003). Hence, the assessment on language used in construction organizations can be considered as a critical factor, in evaluating the impact of communication towards the success of the profession of quantity surveying.

### **Feldberg’s model (1975)**

The Feldberg’s model (1975) emphasizes communication in the means of a process. Accordingly, it is considered that the presence of a sender and receiver, as well as the function of a message and a feedback are necessary variables to assess effective communication until the communication terminate. The model further explains the main issues that relates the sender and receiver as followings.

- Needs
- Perceptions
- Goals
- Background

- External pressures
- Expectations and reactions
- Feedback

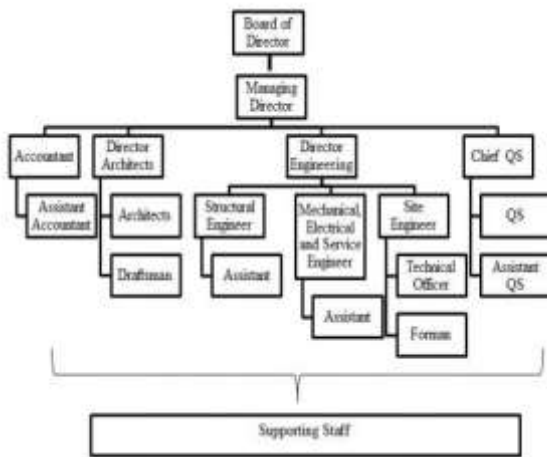


Fig.02: Feldberg's model (1975)

In assessing the requirement of communication that complies with discourse on profession of quantity surveying, Higgin and Jesson, in 1965 have stressed the necessity of communication among the building team in the construction projects in order to develop the custom of interaction. Similarly, the study directed by Lenard and Eckersley (1997) underscored the requirement of having open communications at all levels in the construction organizations. Hence it demonstrates that the quantity surveyors as construction professionals are liable in improving communication the construction process. The efficiency and effectiveness of the construction process strongly depend on the quality of communication (Hoezen *et al*; 2006).

The study directed by Mackinder and Marvin in 1982 revealed a significant fact describing that most of the conflicts in organizations are associated with ineffective communication. Accordingly, the study has found a clear difference between formal and informal communication directions which are used in the organizations with causing conflicts. This study has later been the base to the findings by Hill in 1995 which emphasizing that the divorce of design and production could

also be a circumstance of the revealed gap. Similarly it was found that the Opposing interests could lead to hidden agendas with often leading to restricted communications by Brown in 2001. Therefore, the current research has acknowledged the significance of examining the use of communication in construction organizations to determine the perspective of discourse process & practices in the profession of quantity surveying.

### Power Relations

The management structure of construction organizations in Sri Lanka exhibits adopting hierarchy of authority with illustrating the state of the quantity surveyors in the middle level in the organizational hierarchy in reference to the the organizational structures observed as follows.



Fig.03: Hierarchy of Construction Organizations in Sri Lanka

The necessity of effective communication among these levels in the organizational hierarchies has been cautioned by the findings of numerous research studies. Communication is a process of meaningful interactions by which meanings are perceived and understandings are reached among human beings (Monajib Mochachari, 2013). The study conducted by Emmitt and Gorse in 2003 illustrated communication as a central to the organization, with the structure, extensiveness and scope of the organization. Communication is seen as the life blood of organizational management (Ewing in Puth, 1994). The quantity surveyors play a significant role in coordinating the upper and the bottom levels of the organizations in being in the middle level of the hierarchy.

Similarly, the findings of the research conducted by Ruuska in 1996 illustrates that while information is flowed from top level to lower level of the organizational hierarchy, data is flowed conversely by lower level to top level as the figure no.02 emphasizes. Hence quantity surveyors are in the midpoint of where the information and data are trading. The employees at all the levels being at top position senior level, middle level, junior level or the lower level staff all has to communicate properly and has to take communication seriously and should have to communicate by following the hierarchy and preferred channels of the organizations (Luthra and Singh, 2015).



Fig.04 : Process of Communication in Hierarchy

The book of 'Language and Power' published by the great researcher in linguistic, Norman Fairclough (1989) provides a contextual mean on class and power. The author has sharpened that discourse has effects upon social structures, as well as being determined by them, and so contributes to social continuity and social change. In his perspective, the power relations are always relations of struggles whereby social groupings with different interests engage with one another. Subsequently, the explanations reflect the impact of power and power relations on certain social layers by the use of language. Language is both a site of and a stake in class struggle, and those who exercise power through language must constantly be involved in struggle with others to defend or lose their position (Fairclough, 1989). Therefore, this present study aims at examining power relations through the

perspective of profession of quantity surveying in the context of Sri Lanka.

### Research Gap

The preceding studies have shown a prudent scope in the areas of discourse analysis and subsequently numerous researches have been subjected to the application of discourse and discourse analysis in the areas of philosophy, linguistic and so on. Correspondingly, the past years have shown a greater interest in analyzing discourse process and communication practices in the professional fields such as healthcare, law, offices of land surveying where communication events play a key role in executing the professional duties successfully. The profession of quantity surveying is one such key profession in the field of engineering sciences where the communication plays a pivotal role in determining the successful outcome of their professional roles. No significant study has been done in Sri Lanka in this regard. This study thus sets out to fill this knowledge gap by examining the impact of discourse process and practices, communication events among construction professional's profession of quantity surveying in Sri Lanka.

### Research Methodology

Research in modest expressions indicates detection of knowledge and a scientific and systematic exploration for proof on a detailed theme or subject, hence research methodology is a systematic approach that a research adopts to achieve the exploration aims (Creswell, 2009). The present study has adopted a qualitative research approach in demonstrating benchmarks of the theme. The population implies to the population which a researcher intends to generalize the study findings (Kombo & Tromp,

2006) while stratified sampling method measures the overall population parameters with greater precision and ensures an extraction of a representative sample from a relatively homogenous population (Kothari, 2004).

Consequently, the study has exploited the professionals of construction industry in Sri Lanka into the cluster of population while utilizing a sample of 15 number of participants by the top-level management, quantity surveyors and bottom level management in both contractor and consultant construction firms. The data collection process of the study has proceeded through unstructured interviews in being derived by the accessible literature models and theories prescribed specifically by Hoezen, M.E.L et al (2006) and Ofori, G., (2009). The analysis of the data has followed in subject to the mode of a content analysis.

**Analysis**

***The nature of communication within construction organizations in Sri Lanka***

The present nature of communication in the construction organizations in Sri Lanka is surveyed with the use of information congregated by interviewing professionals ranked at all hierarchical levels. The nature of the discourse process in the certain organizations is found following two-way communication process throughout the levels of management in overall.

In considering the discursive practices exhibited alone over each level, it is revealed that both verbal and non- verbal practices are major modes in between quantity surveyors and the top level of the management. The assessment of language of which each professional practiced at work displayed a greater degree of using *English* in dealing with non-verbal discursive approaches as well as in majority of verbal manners. A few numbers of professionals in the top level of hierarchy displayed use of *Sinhala* in interacting verbally with quantity surveyors, who are in the middle level in structure.

The discursive practice exhibited among middle and bottom levels of the hierarchy through the flow of information indicated a major use of verbal interactions than non-verbal modes. Moreover, the language of which specifically, majority of the

quantity surveyors used to interact with bottom level is found as *Sinhala* while a few practiced *English* language with senior professionals who are in the bottom level of the organization.

In drawing the consideration on the nature of flowing feedbacks within these structures, the present study revealed a progressive flow of feedback from bottom to the middle level. The explanations given by the middle level correspondents pointed that the relationship of which they display with Technical Officers, Site Supervisors and other professionals in the bottom level enabled obtaining feedbacks daily. For an example, some of the construction organizations are having daily team meetings. The evaluation on the use of language in the flow of feedback from bottom to middle levels, has discovered practicing *Sinhala* language as major by the bottom level management to convey feedbacks.

Table 01: Discursive Practices exhibited in Construction Organizations in Sri Lanka

Flow	Hierarchy Levels	Discursive Practices	
		Verbal	Non-Verbal
Flow of Information	Top level to Middle level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• By word</li> <li>• Telephone calls</li> <li>• Meetings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emails</li> <li>• Letters</li> <li>• Drawings, Specifications, and other official documents.</li> </ul>
	Middle level to Bottom level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• By word</li> <li>• Telephone calls</li> <li>• Team Meetings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Notices</li> <li>• Drawings, Specifications, and other official documents.</li> </ul>
Flow of Feedback	Bottom Level to Middle level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• By word</li> <li>• Phone calls</li> <li>• Team meetings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Drawings, Specifications, and other official documents.</li> </ul>
	Middle level to Top level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reports</li> <li>• Board meetings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reports</li> <li>• Board meetings</li> </ul>

In assessing the next phase in the flow of feedback in these construction organizations, the current study has found the quantity surveyors in being in the middle phase of the hierarchy, provide

feedbacks to the top level by non- verbal discursive modes mostly, with presenting a less priority in practicing verbal interactions. Both non-verbal and verbal modes of discourse are found mostly to be practiced in the language of *English* and some of the explanations given by the correspondents in the midlevel of the organizations indicated that although *English* is used wisely, the use of *Sinhala* in verbally varies based on the nature of the professionals who are in the top level management

### ***Analysis on impact of present discourse process & discursive practices in profession of quantity surveying in Sri Lanka***

The findings on the nature of the discourse process revealed in Sri Lankan construction sector provides the base in analyzing the impact of communication towards the discourse on profession of quantity surveying. Consequently, the assessment on degree on the flow of feedback through the key levels of the organizations specified a drop between the flow of feedback from bottom to middle level and middle to top level of the hierarchies. The study revealed that the feedback given by the bottom level to the middle level management of the organizations are much advanced and progressive than the flow of feedback from middle level to the top level. Although the causes for such a gap indicates several facts such as nature of the relationship among different hierarchical phases, leadership style, personal competencies and external influences; the present study has verified the major cause as language proficiency. The correspondent quantity surveyors further indicated the issues and limitations that they had while verbally communicating in the language of English as below.

“We are having issues in dealing in English with our managers and especially in responding to them.”

The Feldberg’s model in 1975 defines the necessity of feedback within the communication process for any organization. Thus, the appraisal stressed on flow of feedback by the current research underscores a defined gap between above and

below the middle level of the hierarchy due to the language proficiency. Hence the study has further analyzed the nature of the language proficiency of all the construction professionals to recognize a common language or a system that would overcome the defined gap. Accordingly, the gradation on language fluency of the professionals examined by the present study explores Sinhala as the language of which majority of professionals in each level are fluent in than English, Tamil and any other language.

In considering the fact of practicing English while exhibiting Sinhala as a common fluent language that majority of the professionals could use specifically for verbal interaction, the research has discovered a tendency of quantity surveyors being indirectly forced to interact in English with the top management of the hierarchy. The following responses obtained by several quantity surveyors, indicate the means as follows.

“We do use English in writing reports, letters and more as the standards that we follow requires to be unique all over, and the verbal communication with senior professionals such as project managers indirectly direct us to use English as a language”.

“Quantity surveyors should be fluent in English not only in documentation, but also in verbal communication to survive in the industry as lack of English competencies will cause conflicts by misunderstanding and more on”.

The findings of interviewing professionals from the top- level management clearly demonstrates that they are more likely to follow English as an administrative tool and a way of controlling subordinates in an effective manner in major. The statement below indicates one of a response obtained by a project manager, emphasizing the need of language as a part of the culture and as a tool of controlling the hierarchy.

“We assess the level of English fluency in recruiting Engineers, Quantity Surveyors and other subordinates as most of the documentations are



formed in English. Verbal communication is also required to perform by them in the same language, as we have the culture of using it in board meetings and in practice. In other hand, it is a way of tool that control them from being much friendly to maintain the professional status”.

### **Evaluation of pros and cons in the discourse process and its subsequent impact**

In addressing the stated gap in the flow of feedback as a necessary fact for an effective communication model, the present research has evaluated the success of having such a custom communication process in practice in Sri Lankan context. Although most of the top managers believe use of *English* language as an effective tool for administration, the middle level management demonstrates a tendency in being resisted to practice *English* as a mode of verbal communication with emphasizing poor skills in it. The study has also stressed the consequences of this gap in resulting being a limitation on discourse. The following statements illustrate the difficulties that quantity surveyors face in verbally communicating with seniors.

“Communicating in English sometimes lead misunderstandings among what we intend to say versus what the managers get due to our poor language proficiency and later of course it makes conflicts.” “Sometimes responding back to the boss is not easy because then I will have to argue or explain in English of which I am not much good at”.

Hence, the discourse processes in the profession of quantity surveyors are found to be influenced by the language of English not just as a communication tool, but also as a mode of power relation in the construction organizations in Sri Lanka.

☐ To forecast the learning experiences to enhance the discursive competence of the Quantity Surveying Career in Sri Lanka

The facts discovered by the present study summaries the consequences on use of English as a language. Accordingly, the stressed gap and power

relations are subjected on the whole structure of the construction organizations. Based on the dispersion of the subjected matters not specifically on profession of quantity surveying but also in the whole society, the study stresses the need of a social change in deforming the gap and power relations to overcome. In focusing on the profession of quantity surveying specifically, the quantity surveyors are found playing a mediating role in dealing with various degrees of language proficiencies in both top and bottom phases of organizations. Hence, this research emphasizes in extending the scope of the role of profession of quantity surveying to empower the future career. Consequently, the enhancement of English language proficiency and communication is significant. Apparently, the study suggests in enlightening the discursive materials and practices with integrating technology to a wider range in overcoming the described gaps.

### **Conclusion**

The assessment on nature of the communication within construction organizations indicates the application of discourse process and discursive practices in each level through both flows of information and feedbacks. The findings emphasizes that quantity surveyors in being at the middle level of the organizational hierarchy is fronting a condition where they have to intermediate the top level and bottom level respectively in English and Sinhala mostly

language proficiency. Moreover, the study has found the use of language by the top levels of hierarchy as a tool of controlling administrative functions where it is emerging as a power relation in the structure of the construction organizations. The evaluation of discourse on profession of quantity surveying has revealed a considerable influence on the profession caused by English language as a verbal communication tool in being creating power relations in the hierarchy of the construction organizations in Sri Lanka.

In reference to the described facts in the study, it is concluded that the quantity surveyors are required to enhance the scope of their profession in being a mediator of discourse by improving the proficiencies of English language and in communication to address the defined gaps.

### Limitations And Further Study Directions

The study has followed assessing the impact of English

language as a major, thus the use of other languages can be evaluated in further. The research has also focused on the perspective of quantity surveying profession specifically among the other professions in the middle level of the hierarchy. Hence, a study can be directed in focusing on the other construction professions.

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### Author Biography



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