

Assessing English Language Needs in Nursing Education: A Comprehensive Study

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Abstract

Within academic institutions, the process of imparting and acquiring knowledge of the English language faces persistent challenges in achieving educational objectives. These obstacles often arise from inadequately devised learning schemes, influencing both educational content and the execution of learning procedures. Such hindrances may not align with the specific field of study pursued by students. Addressing this, it becomes crucial to strategically approach the educational process by conducting a needs assessment based on the preferences and requirements of students regarding their objective of learning English. This research, focusing on Nursing students, aims to scrutinise the necessity of English proficiency in the nursing field. The findings reveal a discerning awareness among the nursing students regarding the significance of the English language in their profession. While students demonstrate proficiency in reading and listening, there exists a pressing need for refinement in speaking and writing skills. Additionally, the study brings to light the inadequacies of the current English syllabus in General Nursing and Midwifery and B.Sc. Nursing, emphasising its failure to meet the specific linguistic demands of students. Consequently, respondents emphatically advocate substantial revisions to the existing English syllabus, highlighting the importance of tailoring language education to the unique needs of nursing students for a more effective curriculum.

Keywords: English language, needs-analysis, nursing students, English for specific purposes, general nursing and midwifery, B.Sc. nursing

Introduction

The field of Nursing, both as an educational pursuit and a professional vocation, has evolved into a globally recognised discipline in response to its ever-increasing demand on a global scale. Healthcare institutions and hospitals have proliferated, akin to bustling colonies of ants, in view of the myriad health-related challenges that individuals face. Nurses serve as the invaluable eyes and ears of medical practitioners, without whom doctors would be unable to fulfil their duties effectively. Moreover, nurses extend their roles to provide companionship to patients, constantly attending to their needs, engaging in meaningful conversations, offering guidance, ensuring their well-being, and providing unwavering encouragement. It is imperative to acknowledge that the nursing profession entails a rigorous and demanding workload. Hence, it is quite mandatory that the nurses are reasonably competent in using the language that is in demand and commonly used worldwide. It is quite easy and beneficial to learn the language during academic tenure as the students are provided with ample opportunities and a suitable environment to use the language without hesitation and fear. However, it is also important that the students are provided with suitable language syllabus that can be helpful to the students to practise the language that they possibly use in their profession. Therefore, it is important to determine the language needs of the learners. Such a syllabus falls under the category of English for Specific Purposes.

Significance of Needs in Language Learning

In the realm of education, scholars have offered diverse interpretations of language needs based on their individual viewpoints. Widdowson (1981) delineated needs into two distinct classifications: the initial category referred to as “goal-oriented”, and the second category denoted as “process-oriented”. According to Widdowson’s perspective, “needs” include both the immediate and future necessities of the learners, encompassing what they aspire to acquire upon completing a language course. Berwick (1989) introduced the concepts of “perceived” needs versus “felt” needs. The former pertains to the language instructor’s assessment of what the students should learn, whereas the latter pertains to the learner’s own perception and feelings regarding what they need to acquire. Berwick highlights that, in the context of adult education, needs essentially signify the disparity between the current situation

and the desired future state. Brindley (1989) introduced the concepts of “Objective”, and “Subjective” needs. The former needs are rooted in the learner’s goal for achieving proficiency in language, while the latter encompasses the learner’s self-awareness of language learning and their emotional needs which are perceived as influential factors by external observers.

Hutchinson and Water (1987) introduced a set of core ideas related to educational needs, specifically labelled as “target” and “learning” needs. The notion of target needs encompasses the predominant traits of learners, which can be categorised into three distinct divisions, specifically termed as “necessities”, “lacks”, and “wants”. Necessities can be interpreted as the foundational knowledge that learners must acquire to achieve proficiency in the English language. Lacks denote the existing gaps in the linguistics abilities of learners. Wants denote the personal perspective of learners regarding their needs or their longing to satisfy their individual needs. Mackay (1978) put forward a classification of needs, delineating them into two distinct categories: Academic needs and Job needs. Academic needs encompass the essential knowledge base that students specialising in specific academic disciplines ought to acquire, entailing a comprehensive grasp of the specialised terminology pertinent to their respective fields. Conversely, job needs denote the knowledge and skills that the employees are obliged to apply in fulfilling their duties. Nonetheless, according to the findings of Noe (2002), needs are linked to the insufficiency of individual learning and professional experiences in mastering English proficiency. Identifying their specific English language necessities can enhance the ability of non-native learners to excel while communicating in English.

Based on the insights of Kaufman and English (1979), needs can be considered as the disparity between the current situation and aspired condition. This involves recognising the issue, understanding an individual’s action and the methods that facilitate the current situation, and creating a foundation for taking action. In line with Stufflebeam (1977), needs can be described as a mismatch between the performance one aims for and what has been observed or anticipated. A need represents something whose absence or insufficiency can result in harm. According to Richterich and Chancerel (1980), in assessing a student’s language needs, the evaluation should encompass comprehensive information concerning the learners who will engage in language

acquisition and their intended application of the knowledge acquired post-course completion.

Method

The present study employed a survey method. A questionnaire consisting of Likert-scale statements, and multi-response statements was developed, validated, and administered among total 235 students enrolled in General Nursing and Midwifery and B.Sc. Nursing at Institute of Nursing Sciences and Shree G. H. Patel School of Nursing affiliated to Bhaikaka University, Karamsad. Out of a total of 235 students, 227 participants submitted their responses and therefore the data collected from these 227 questionnaires were used for analysis. The data were analysed using SPSS software.

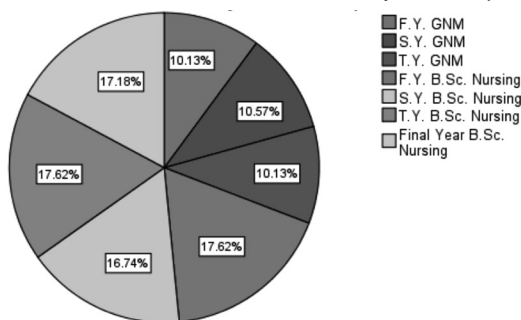
Results and Discussion

Table 1. *Gender of Respondents*

<i>Gender of Respondents</i>					
		<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>	<i>Valid Percent</i>	<i>Cumulative Percent</i>
Valid	Male	46	20.3	20.3	20.3
	Female	181	79.7	79.7	100.0
	Total	227	100.0	100.0	

As can be seen in Table 1, a total of 227 nursing students of Institute of Nursing Sciences and Shree G.H. Patel School of Nursing, Karamsad participated in the survey. Out of 227 participants, 181 were female and 46 were male.

Figure 1. *Course and Academic Year of the Respondents*



The pie chart in Figure 1 reveals the distribution of survey participants across different nursing courses, providing valuable insights into the composition of the respondent population. Notably, "F.Y. B.Sc. Nursing" emerges as the most prevalent category, constituting 17.6% of the total participants. Following closely are "T.Y. B.Sc. Nursing" and "Final Year B.Sc. Nursing," each representing 17.6% and 17.2% of the respondents, respectively. Collectively, these three courses contribute to approximately 52.4% of the total sample. Contrary to an initial oversight, the first three courses ("F.Y. GNM," "S.Y. GNM," and "T.Y. GNM") together account for around 30.8% of the participants, suggesting a more balanced distribution across various nursing programmes.

Table 2. *Mother Tongue of the Respondents*

<i>Mother Tongue</i>					
		<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>	<i>Valid Percent</i>	<i>Cumulative Percent</i>
Valid	Gujarati	224	98.7	98.7	98.7
	Hindi	2	.9	.9	99.6
	Malayalam	1	.4	.4	100.0
	Total	227	100.0	100.0	

Table 2 provides insights into the distribution of mother tongues among the participants in a survey. The majority of respondents, constituting 98.7%, reported Gujarati as their mother tongue. This indicates a dominance of Gujarati speakers in the surveyed population. In contrast, a mere 0.9% of participants identified Hindi as their mother tongue, reflecting a comparatively small representation. Furthermore, only 0.4% of the respondents reported Malayalam as their mother tongue. This data underscores the dominance of Gujarati as the primary mother tongue among the surveyed individuals.

Table 3. *Medium of Instruction at the College Level*

<i>Medium of Instruction at the College Level</i>					
		<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>	<i>Valid Percent</i>	<i>Cumulative Percent</i>
Valid	English	227	100.0	100.0	100.0

Table 3 shows that all 227 participants selected English as their medium of instruction at college level. The data implies that as English is the

medium of instruction, it is mandatory to know the use of English as they must deal with English language during their academic tenure in the college.

Table 4. *Places Where Respondents Use English Language*

Respo- nses		<i>Class- room</i>	<i>Social Gathering</i>	<i>At Home</i>	<i>With Friends</i>	<i>Other Purposes</i>	<i>Total</i>
	N	204	42	40	72	19	377
	Percent- age	54.1	11.1	10.6	19.1	5.0	100.0
	Percent- age of cases	96.7	19.9	19.0	34.1	9.0	178.7

It can be seen in Table 4 that the majority of the participants (54.1%) use English in the classroom indicating that English is the dominant language in the academic setting. Use of English language in social gatherings and at home obtains 11.1%, and 10.6% responses respectively implying that these offer fewer contexts for the use of English among the participants. English is also used in interactions with friends, with 19.1% of the participants using English in this context. Other purposes, which covers other contexts where English is used, has 5.0% of the participants reporting the use of English for various purposes.

Table 5. *Respondents' Ratings of Their Fluency in Different Language Skills*

<i>Language Skills</i>		<i>Excellent</i>	<i>Very Good</i>	<i>Good</i>	<i>Aver- age</i>	<i>Below Average</i>	<i>Total</i>
Listening Skills	Frequency	37	51	91	37	11	227
	Percentage	16.3	22.5	40.1	16.3	4.8	100.0
Speaking Skills	Frequency	7	12	42	95	71	227
	Percentage	3.1	5.3	18.5	41.9	31.3	100.0
Reading Skills	Frequency	32	41	106	36	12	227
	Percentage	14.1	18.1	46.7	15.9	5.3	100.0
Writing Skills	Frequency	9	18	53	84	63	227
	Percentage	5.0	7.9	23.3	37.0	27.8	100.0

Table 5 presents a comprehensive overview of respondents' ratings of their language skills in the survey, with data categorised by skill type and level of proficiency. In terms of listening skills, the majority of

respondents rated themselves as having a good level (40.1%), followed by very good (22.5%) and excellent (16.3%). However, a notable proportion also rated their listening skills as average (16.3%). For speaking skills, a significant percentage of respondents reported an average proficiency (41.9%), while 31.3% rated themselves below average. Reading skills show a diverse distribution, with the highest percentage in the good category (46.7%), while writing skills exhibit a substantial proportion in the good (23.3%) and average (37.0%) categories. Overall, the data suggests that respondents generally feel confident with respect to their reading skills, followed closely by listening skills, whereas speaking and writing skills appear to be more challenging for a considerably large number of participants, as evidenced by higher percentages in the average and below-average categories.

Table 6. *Reasons to be Efficient in Listening Skills for Nursing Students*

<i>Responses</i>			
<i>Reasons to be Efficient in Listening</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	<i>Percentage of Cases</i>
To listen and understand medical lectures and presentations	219	31.3	96.5
To listen to instructions and explanations of medical instruments	118	16.9	52.0
To comprehend the content delivered	199	28.5	87.7
To comprehend the medical terminology	163	23.3	71.8
Total	699	100	307.9

Table 6 highlights the nursing students' perspectives on the importance of listening skills. The majority (31.3%) recognises the necessity for understanding medical lectures, emphasising the significance of grasping complex concepts. Additionally, 16.9% underscore the practical application of good listening skills in clinical settings, particularly with medical instruments. Moreover, 28.5% stress the importance of efficient listening for comprehending overall content, extending beyond specific lectures. Notably, 23.3% emphasise the need for precise understanding of medical terminology. In summary, efficient listening skills are deemed crucial for a comprehensive nursing education, encompassing both academic and practical aspects.

Table 7. *Reasons to be Efficient in Speaking Skills for Nursing Students*

<i>Responses</i>			
<i>Reasons to be Efficient in Speaking</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	<i>Percentage of Cases</i>
For classroom activities	197	31.9	86.8
Exchanging opinions about nursing and medication procedures	51	8.3	22.5
For communicative functions like advising, suggesting, requesting etc.	176	28.5	77.5
For communicating with patients, doctors and colleagues	193	31.3	85.0
Total	617	100.0	271.8

The results highlight the crucial role of proficient speaking skills for nursing students. Respondents emphasise the necessity of effective communication, with 31.9% recognising its importance in classroom activities. Another 28.5% highlight the diverse applications of speaking skills in advisory and suggestive contexts. Additionally, 31.3% emphasise the interpersonal dimension, essential for interactions with patients, doctors, and colleagues in healthcare. A smaller percentage, 8.3%, underscores the significance of speaking skills in collaborative discussions on nursing procedures and medication. Overall, the findings reveal that nursing students associate speaking proficiency with various activities, extending beyond education to encompass clinical and collaborative aspects of their professional lives.

Table 8. *Reasons to be Efficient in Reading Skills for Nursing Students*

<i>Responses</i>			
<i>Reasons to be Efficient in Reading</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	<i>Percentage of Cases</i>
To read and understand medical texts, notes, etc.	215	35.2	96.0
To understand nursing reports	145	23.8	64.7
To read and comprehend scientific writings	90	14.8	40.2
To comprehend the prescriptions, vital signs descriptions, etc	160	26.2	71.4
Total	610	100.0	272.3

It can be seen in Table 7 that a significantly large section of the respondents (35.2%) believe that nursing students need efficient reading skills primarily to read and understand medical text, notes, and other related materials. Furthermore, this reason accounts for the highest percentages of total cases (96.0%), indicating that it is a widely held opinion among the respondents. A substantially large section of the respondents (23.8%) emphasised the importance of efficient reading skills for understanding nursing reports. Similarly, 26.2% of respondents mentioned the need for nursing students to read and comprehend scientific writings. The reason also represents 71.4 of the total cases, demonstrating that a significant number of the respondents associate reading skills with understanding scientific materials. Nearly 14.8% of the respondents indicated that efficient reading skills are necessary for comprehending prescription, vital signs description, and similar medical information.

Table 9. *Reasons to be Efficient in Writing Skills for Nursing Students*

<i>Responses</i>			
<i>Reasons to be Efficient in Writing</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	<i>Percentage of Cases</i>
To write class assignments and projects	211	30.8	93.0
To write patient history and prescriptions	196	28.7	86.3
To write instructions of medical procedures	107	15.6	47.1
To write research papers, articles, reports etc.	170	24.9	74.9
Total	684	100.0	301.3

Table 9 offers insights into the opinions of survey participants regarding the significance of efficient writing skills for nursing students. A majority of the respondents, 30.8%, emphasised the importance of writing skills for nursing students to complete class assignments and projects. Another notable reason mentioned by 28.7% of respondents is the need for writing skills when documenting patient history and prescription which indicates that this aspect is crucial in the nursing profession as it involves accurate and clear communication in healthcare settings. A relatively smaller number of the respondents, 15.6%, believe that nursing students need writing skills to write instructions of medical procedure. Lastly, 24.9% of the respondents cited the importance of writing skills for producing research papers, articles, and reports, etc. which implies

that nursing students need to excel in academic and research-related writing.

Table 10. *Nursing Students' Views on Present Syllabus of English in Nursing*

<i>Statement</i>		<i>SD</i>	<i>D</i>	<i>UD</i>	<i>A</i>	<i>SA</i>	<i>Total</i>
The present syllabus of English met my language needs to function successfully in my academic studies.	Frequency	37	116	12	45	17	227
	Percentage	16.3	51.1	5.3	19.8	7.5	100.0
The present syllabus of English develops my general skill/knowledge in English.	Frequency	19	44	10	124	30	227
	Percentage	8.4	19.4	4.4	54.6	13.2	100.0
The present syllabus of English equips me with enough skill/knowledge of medical English.	Frequency	44	110	9	40	24	227
	Percentage	19.4	48.5	4.0	17.6	10.6	100.0
English course teaching hours are adequate.	Frequency	57	118	6	27	19	227
	Percentage	25.1	52.0	2.6	11.9	8.4	100.0
The present syllabus of English requires changes and modifications.	Frequency	19	34	4	119	51	227
	Percentage	8.3	15.0	1.8	52.4	22.5	100.0
The syllabus of English language based on the needs of the students will be more helpful to the students than the regular/traditional syllabus.	Frequency	16	23	25	97	66	227
	Percentage	7.1	10.1	11.0	42.7	29.1	100.0

It can be seen in Table 10 that a majority (67.3%) disagreed or strongly disagreed that the present syllabus of English met their language needs for academic studies, while 27.3% agreed or strongly agreed. About 67.8% agreed or strongly agreed that the syllabus of English develop their general skills/knowledge, while 27.8% disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement. Nearly, 67.9% respondents do not believe that the English language syllabus equips them with medical English

skills. Majority of the respondents (77.1) were of the view that the sessions allocated to English are not adequate. Hence, there is a need to increase the number of English sessions in Nursing program. A significant majority of the respondents (74.9%) believe that the present syllabus of English requires changes or modifications. A substantially large percentage of the respondents (71.8%) concede that a need-based syllabus will be more helpful than the traditional syllabus of English.

Overall, the data revealed a mixed perception among the respondents regarding the syllabus of English in Nursing with a call for changes and preference for a need-based approach. Many respondents did not feel that the current syllabus of English adequately meets their language needs or equips them with medical English skills. However, a majority found it beneficial for developing their general English skills.

Table 11. *Use of English Language to Perform Different Tasks*

<i>Statements</i>		<i>Always</i>	<i>Of- ten</i>	<i>Some- times</i>	<i>Rarely</i>	<i>Never</i>	<i>Total</i>
Explaining admission procedures	Frequency	17	23	95	48	44	227
	Percent	7.5	10.1	41.9	21.1	19.4	100.0
Interacting with patients	Frequency	17	26	67	71	46	227
	Percent	7.5	11.5	29.5	31.2	20.3	100.0
Instructing how to take medication	Frequency	14	12	52	62	87	227
	Percent	6.2	5.3	22.9	27.3	38.3	100.0
Explaining medical tests and treatments	Frequency	9	14	39	57	108	227
	Percent	4.0	6.2	17.1	25.1	47.6	100.0
Taking vital signs	Frequency	29	57	85	32	24	227
	Percent	12.8	25.1	37.4	14.1	10.6	100.0
Reading medical reports or records	Frequency	50	70	33	46	28	227
	Percent	22.0	30.8	14.5	20.4	12.3	100.0
Explaining operation procedures	Frequency	3	4	25	61	134	227
	Percent	1.3	1.8	11.0	26.9	59.0	100.0
Writing nurse diaries/ health reports/ incident reports/case histories	Frequency	200	23	1	1	2	227
	Percent	88.1	10.2	.4	.4	.9	100.0

Table 11 presents the viewpoints of survey participants on using English

for various healthcare tasks. In the context of explaining admission procedures, the majority of respondents (41.9%) indicated that they use English sometimes, followed by those who often use it (10.1%). Notably, a significant number (19.4%) reported rarely or never using English for this task. For interacting with patients, the distribution is more varied, with 29.5% using English sometimes and 31.2% often. Instructing how to take medication sees a dominant preference for always using English (6.2%), but a considerably large percentage (38.3%) rarely or never uses English for this purpose.

Explaining medical tests and treatments elicits a diverse response, with 25.1% often using English and 47.6% rarely or never doing so. Taking vital signs sees a substantial preference for often (25.1%) and always (12.8%) using English, indicating a higher reliance on English in this critical healthcare task. Reading medical reports or records is reported by a significant percentage (30.8%) as often using English, while a notable proportion (20.4%) rarely uses English for this activity.

In contrast, explaining operation procedures exhibits a clear trend of infrequent English usage, with 59.0% reporting never using English for this task. The task of writing nurse diaries, health reports, incident reports, and case histories shows a striking preference for always using English (88.1%), underlining its central role in written healthcare documentation.

In summary, the analysis reveals varying degrees of reliance on English across different healthcare tasks. While some activities, such as writing reports, exhibit a strong inclination towards English usage, others, like explaining operation procedures, demonstrate a significant reliance on other languages. This diversity underscores the importance of language proficiency and communication skills tailored to the specific demands of different healthcare tasks.

Key Findings

The survey of nursing students offers insights into their language preferences and practices. A predominantly female respondent group with diverse representation across nursing courses highlights the importance of understanding the linguistic context. Gujarati is the dominant mother tongue (98.7%), emphasising the need for linguistic diversity awareness. English is the exclusive medium of instruction (100%), underscoring its significance in academic settings.

Language usage in healthcare tasks varies, with English often used in admission procedures and patient interaction but less so in explaining operations. The survey highlights challenges in speaking and writing skills, suggesting the need for targeted language development programmes. Respondents recognise the practical importance of language skills in healthcare contexts, from understanding medical lectures to effective communication.

Participants express mixed views on the English syllabus, indicating a need for changes and a preference for a need-based approach. Overall, the findings emphasise the importance of tailored language education programs to address diverse linguistic backgrounds, skill levels, and specific healthcare communication needs in nursing education.

Conclusion

Based on the findings and discussion, nursing students show a strong understanding of the importance of mastering English in the field of Nursing due to its global demand. They excel in reading and understanding English but lack confidence in speaking and writing. English usage in healthcare is increasing. Healthcare professionals, especially nurses, need to be highly proficient in English. Nursing students are dissatisfied with the current English curriculum and advocate a tailored syllabus that equips them with essential language skills for their profession. In conclusion, it is recommended to create a curriculum tailored to nursing students' unique language needs to support their skill development.

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