

LANGUAGE SKILLS NEEDED BY NURSES AIMING TO WORK ABROAD: A NEED ANALYSIS OF ENGLISH FOR NURSING

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ABSTRACT


This qualitative study explored the essential English language skills that should be prepared by nurses to be eligible to work and adapt in English native speaking countries. The study also provided the information on what kind of topics or materials that should be taught to prepare the nurses who might take the English proficiency test as one of the requirement to work aboard. This study used literature review and interview as the techniques to collect the data. The literature review summarized various sources while the interview obtained data from the nurses as the respondents of this study. The results of this study showed that the nurses who wanted to work aboard need to prepare and excel their communication skill in English in order to ease them in activities such as small talk, oral and written reports, etc. Besides, mastering medical terms is also important for the nurses as it relates to their professional work.

KEYWORDS: *Need Analysis, English for Specific Purposes, English for Nursing.*

INTRODUCTION

The need for medical professionals across the world is getting higher than ever. One of the contributing factors is the pandemic that greatly hit the world. Furthermore, the availability of job in the home country and better payment have also driven nurses from all over the place to migrate to a new country for a better job instalment, brighter future career, and higher salary. For instance, some nurses from Asia choose to migrate from their home countries to an English speaking country such as New Zealand and Australia. They choose to move overseas because the salary and career offered are more promising than in their home country (Matsuno, 2009; Ohr, Parker, Jeong & Joyce, 2010).

However, to migrate and work in other countries, nurses need to meet several requirements and qualifications. These are included the qualification of medical personnel that is not a new issue in this globalization era. It has happened for many years now (Kingma, 2007). For example, to become a qualified and certified nurse in



New Zealand is not easy. There are seven main standards to qualify as a registered nurse, including: proven identity, English language proficiency, current registration, nursing qualification, post-registration experience, fitness to practice, and competent to practice (Nursing Council of New Zealand, 2020).

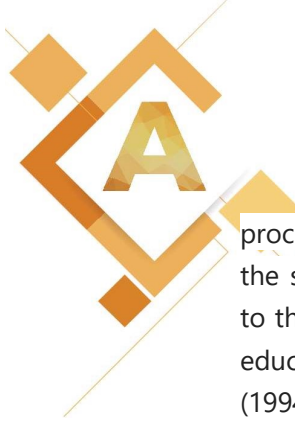
As mentioned in the standards above, one of the requirements is language qualification that usually becomes a hurdle for those who apply for nurses' position in New Zealand. New Zealand government requires 7 in all bands (reading, listening, writing and speaking) of IELTS (International English Language Testing System). Another language test option is OET which stands for Occupational English Test and it is specifically designed for occupation purposes such as for healthcare workers. The minimum score of 350 for each band is expected for the OET. Fortunately, some countries already introduce English in their nursing subject, but the potential nurses who want to apply for overseas station still worry about their English proficiency (Tsujita, 2017). However, there are still nurses who aim to work overseas that think English proficiency is one of their challenges. For instance, the Filipino nurses who are already exposed to English still feel burdened because their target countries increase the passing level of English proficiency (Carlos, Roxas, & Suzuki, 2017). On the other hand, Thai nurses feel worried whether they have enough competency to pass the band score required by the host countries (Tsujita, 2017).

Thus, in this study the authors tried to explore the required English language skills that nurses should prepare to be eligible to work and adapt to the host country. For this reason, the analysis of language proficiency requirement was conducted and relevant research findings of the nurse' language needs were also summarized. The significance of this study was to provide insightful information on what kind of topics or materials that should be provided to prepare the nurses who might take IELTS or OET to work overseas.

LITERATURE REVIEW

NEED ANALYSIS

Need analysis is one of the fundamental aspects in designing the format of a subject or an educational program, its material, and its teaching techniques (Bosher, & Smalkoski, 2002; Brown, & Voltz, 2005; Carter & Nunan, 2001; Richards, & Renandya, 2002). Thus, the studies using need analysis have been employed by many experts that defined need analysis itself in various definitions. Basturkemen (2010) states that need analysis is a process of analyzing and identifying learner's current knowledge, expectation, and possibility and limitation in the teaching context. Meanwhile, Nunan, Candlin, and Widdowson (1988) express that need analysis is the set of



procedures to gather data about the learners and the use of communication task in the syllabus. In addition, Carter and Nunan (2001) describe that need analysis refers to the “analysis to determine what students need to be able to do in English in their educational or professional situation” (p. 224). This description is close to what West (1994, p. 1) has noted about the concept related to need analysis, which is “what learners will be required to do with the foreign language in the target situation and how learners might best master the target language during the period of training”. This need analysis consists of the activities of gathering the data about what learners’ needs that may give a sufficient understanding about learners’ situations and backgrounds, and help succeed the course program, design, and development (“Need Analysis”, n.d).


THE PROCESS OF NEED ANALYSIS

Need analysis requires a comprehensive process to provide adequate information about learners’ needs (West, 1994). In relation to this, Basturkemen (2010) describes that the process involves analyzing target situation, discourse, present situation, learner factor and teaching context. In addition, Brown and Green (2006, as cited in Hunkins & Ornstein, 2016) suggest that need analysis should be conducted through setting the time frame and executors for the need analysis, creating or gathering appropriate instruments, listing curriculum’s aims and goals, matching curriculum’s aim and goals, identifying the gap between desired and actual results, deciding the gaps priority and suggesting solution of the identified gaps.

To gather the data in conducting a need analysis, a triangular approach by collecting the data from two or more sources is ideally suggested (Richards, 2001). Some methods that can be used are interview, questionnaire, test, journal and logs, language audits, participant and non-participant observation ethnographic methods (Long, 2005). Additionally, Richards (2001) also suggests experts’ opinion (literature review), self-rating and a case study to get the data for the need analysis.

THE IMPORTANCE OF NEED ANALYSIS IN ENGLISH FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES

As mentioned above need analysis is one of the important aspects in designing an appropriate education program, especially in learning English (Bosher, & Smalkoski, 2002; Brown, & Voltz, 2005; Carter & Nunan, 2001; Richards, & Renandya, 2002). It is a vital asset because it can help identify learners’ key requirements in English for Specific Purpose and determine learners’ skill deficiency (Alsamadani, 2017). Moreover, Amalia (2017) mentions that need analysis is crucial because it can link the materials and the methods of teaching with the needs of students in learning English,



thus the learning outcome can be achieved effectively. Besides, need analysis can also help to define English key roles according to learners' occupational situations, and thus it is crucial as the first step in designing English for Specific Purposes (Carter & Nunan, 2001). This benefit can be applied in finding out what specific English language skills that learners need to fill in a particular position/job such as a nurse, a teacher, a sales manager, etc. (Richards, 2001). In other words, need analysis can also build the profile of professional learners in learning foreign language and communication (Huhta, Vogt, Johnson, & Tulkki, 2013).

RESEARCH METHODS

This qualitative research aimed to understand the required English language skill that the nurses need to prepare to be eligible to work and adapt to the target country. For this reason, two types of data collection techniques were employed in this study, literature review and interview.

DATA COLLECTION

To collect the data for this research on the nurse' need analysis, the authors used a triangular approach with literature review and interview as the instruments. The literature review is one of the methods to gather data in need analysis (Jordan, 1997; Richards, 2001). Thus, the literature works were collected to answer the question of what skills the nurse needed to have to be ready to work overseas. The previous studies collected were all related to the field of English in the nursing context. Those studies researched non-native nurses in communicating in English at workplaces.

In addition, to strengthen the data, the authors also employed an interview. The authors used a semi-structured interview in this study. As Friedman (2011) stated, in semi-structured interviews the researcher prepares a set of questions (or interview guide) as the basis for the interviews. However, he or she may deviate from the guide in order to pursue topics that arise during the course of the interview. This means that there are possibilities of follow up questions after each written question depending on how interesting and related the answers are. In this study, only one of the authors acted as the interviewer in this study to avoid any inconvenience.

PARTICIPANTS

The participant of for the interview was a nurse from Indonesia who is currently working in New Zealand. The authors made sure the nurse had agreed to be involved in this study in which the identity of the nurse will remain confidential. One of the authors made an appointment with the nurse to conduct the semi-structured

interview. During the interview, all conversations between the nurse and one of the writers were recorded, and the conversations were then transcribed for analysis.


RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The language qualification is enforced to ensure that nurses can communicate with the patient clearly. Communication aspects such as dealing with the patient's family and explaining the conditions of the patient are very important for nurses. In addition to oral skills, nurses need to write letters or patient reports, so skills in other aspects such as writing are also important for nurses to master. The qualified nurses may already know all the job requirements or responsibilities in their native language, but to transfer it to another language (English) can be a big challenge for some.

NURSE'S NEED FOR ENGLISH SKILLS BASED ON LITERATURE REVIEW

Based on the literature review, there are plenty of challenges that nurses have to prepare for. The main challenge is being proficient in the language of the host country. As mentioned by the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Accreditation Council (2017), language proficiency in the workplace is a crucial matter. The Council notes that the English proficiency of nurses is very necessary to ensure the best quality services for the patients. Besides that, as revealed in several studies, communication skills are also one of the biggest language problems faced by international educated nurses (Kawi & Xu, 2009; Xu, 2007). These problems should be seen as important issues not only because it can affect the adaptation process of the nurses, but it also has an impact toward the patient safety and the quality of the treatment (Xu, 2007).

To address this problem, Miyake and Tremarco (2005) researched undergraduate nurses, postgraduate nurses, and professional nurses in Japan. Their study intended to determine the language aspects these nurses needed the most in the workplace settings. They used interview and questionnaire to collect the data on their need analysis. Their study found that the socio-communicative skills such as obtaining patient information or small talks are the most important skill that nurses must possess. Similarly, a study conducted by Saragih (2014) on nursing students in Indonesia, as well as on the lecturers of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) program and Indonesian nurses who worked in the English-speaking countries revealed the same results. The skills such as explaining the patient conditions and making questions are top priority skills that nurses should have. Other communicative skills that nurses need to encompass include building rapport with patients, expressing empathy, calming patients, and convincing patients (Cameron, 1998; Boshier & Smalkoski, 2002; Xu, 2007; Hussin, 2008).




Furthermore, another language aspect needed by the nurses in the workplace settings is technical vocabulary (Cameron, 1998; Miyake and Tremarco, 2005; Saragih, 2014). As noted by Cameron (1998), the accurate use of vocabulary will contribute to a better understanding of patient-nurse interactions. However, Cameron (1998) also highlights that accuracy is not merely on the use of vocabulary, but also in the word stress and grammar such as the use of modals. Such accuracy problems are one of the causes of misunderstanding in nurse-patient interactions and should be avoided to ensure the safety of the patients. Moreover, Saragih (2014) say that the nurses will not be confident to interact with the patients if they lack medical-related vocabulary. Nevertheless, Miyake and Tremarco (2005) emphasize that it is important to learn vocabulary, but it should be taught moderately with relevant health vocabulary related to diseases and medical procedures and not ignore the importance of socio-communicative skills.

In addition, other important skills that the nurses need are listening and reading skills. The nurses should have such skills to be able to understand the accent and pronunciation and the fast pace speech (Bosher & Smalkoski, 2002; Kawi & Xu, 2009, Saragih 2014). These skills are needed because the nurses will also answer the phone calls from the patients who do not know the nurses' level of English or communicate with people from a different culture. Kawi and Xu (2009) state that when the nurses do not know the difference in accents and pronunciation, it not only causes a misunderstanding with the patients, but also makes the nurses stressful. Besides, Miyake and Tremarco (2005) also point out that reading skills are important for the nurses to master since they will read medical reports and patient notes.

THE NURSE'S PERSPECTIVE ON THE NEED FOR ENGLISH SKILLS

In general, the results of the interview align with previous studies especially in communication skills. According to the nurse interviewed in this study (hereafter referred to Nurse A), communication skills such as having small talks and showing empathy are necessary. Furthermore, Nurse A states that showing empathy is important especially when dealing with an elderly or a depressed patient. Showing empathy can be used to help the patient to calm down and to reduce the stress. Another communication skill needed by the nurses is asking permission. In the medical setting, the nurses must ask permission from the patient before doing any examination especially if it involves a physical examination. In addition, explaining the patient conditions or medical procedures is also a must-have skill for the nurses.



On the contrary, Nurse A mentions that medical terms should be used appropriately depending on whom the other person the nurses are talking to. The nurses are not recommended to use medical jargons in explaining patients' conditions as it may confuse the patients. Therefore, being able to explain medical jargons in everyday language is important for the nurses. However, the nurses still need to know the technical vocabulary. Nurse A says that she and her co-workers usually use the technical words when they are interacting with fellow nurses or doctors, but not with most of the patients.

Additionally, Nurse A also states that listening skills and reading skills are also equally important for professional nurses. Reading skill such as academic reading is one of the ways to upgrade nurses' competency. In New Zealand, to have a higher qualification, the nurses should demonstrate their knowledge in recent medical issues. They are encouraged to read research articles or academic reports related to medical issues. Therefore, Nurse A suggests that any nurse who wants to be successful should have a good academic reading skill. In terms of listening skill, Nurse A says that New Zealand accent has caused her a problem during her early stage of working there. To avoid this situation, Nurse A suggests that nurse candidates familiarize themselves with New Zealand accent, or the accent of the target country. Nurse A also recommends re-confirmation if there is something that is not understood during the interaction.

When discussing the writing skill, Nurse A mentions that the nurses must know how to write patients reports, folders, and hand-over letters. Reports and folders for the patients let the nurses on duty get updated on the patients' conditions and on the patients' next treatments during the nurses' shift period. In addition, when asked about the hand-over letter, Nurse A describes that as the letter that the nurses make as they move patients from one facility to another and refer the patients to other doctors or nurses. It contains patient information and required actions at the new facility or new medical personnel. Typically, the nurses create this letter based on the patient reports and folders. According to Nurse A, moving the patients to other facilities such as from a primary clinic center to a hospital or a nursing home is a routine in a medical setting. Therefore, it is important to have this writing skill. However, Nurse A also adds that if there is a transfer at the same hospital, the nurses only need to call and report everything by phone.

CONCLUSIONS


In summary, the literature review and the interview with the nurse working overseas have shown similar results in terms of topics and materials that should be provided to

prepare the nurses aiming to work in English native countries. The main skills needed by the nurses is English communication skills, especially speaking and writing skills. These two skills are crucial so that the nurses can obtain, explain, and provide patients' information such as their medical record, their current prognosis, etc. Besides, the speaking skill such as small talks will also help the nurses comfort the patients to speed their recovery. On the other hand, the receptive skills such as reading and listening are also beneficial to the nurses to improve their professional competence, for example, when they read and confirm the information from the medical reports and articles. In addition, obtaining and using the medical terms are also necessary, so that the nurses can work professionally at their new station aboard. However, the medical terms should be properly used depending on the speaking partners.

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