Original article ■

Efficacy of English Language Programs as Judged by Nurses and Students of Nursing: Do Nurses in Iran Need to Know English?

Nematullah Shomoossi[1], Mostafa Rad[2], Mohammad Hasan Rakhshani[3]

[1]*Department of English, Sabzevar University of Medical Sciences, Sabzevar, Iran*

[2]*Department of Post Graduate, School of Nursing and Midwifery, Mashhad University of Medical Sciences, Mashhad, Iran*

[3]*Department of Statistics, Sabzevar University of Medical Sciences, Sabzevar, Iran*

SUMMARY

Nurses among other medical professions are expected and need to communicate in English. The present study will report the views of *nurses* and *students of nursing* on the efficacy of English programs at Iranian medical universities in three major areas: *general usage, medical usage, and research usage*.

This descriptive study included 130 students of nursing and 167 nurses selected through randomized clustering sampling. It was conducted in Sabzevar, Iran. They were asked to fill out a questionnaire including demographic information and 31 Likert questions on the effectiveness of ELT programs in medical universities.

The participants judged the efficacy of EFL instruction in the General English section to be 25.7306±8.29288 (out of 50), the Medical English to be 21.1434± 7.40024 (out of 45), and the Research usage to be 24.6496±11.56735 (out of 60), showing a wide gap. However, the effectiveness of the current ELT programs was not so differently judged by male and female participants. Males considered the Research usage to be more affected by the current programs but females did not think so; however, the difference of views was not statistically significant (P=0.019).

In general, the results indicated a wide gap between the judgment of nurses and students of nursing about the efficacy of the ELT programs in Iranian medical universities. Therefore, a change is needed to cater for the expectations from the nursing job as far as the English language is concerned as a means of communication in the world today.

Key words: **English, nursing, education, course design, needs analysis**

Corresponding author:

Nematullah Shomoossi •

e-mail: nshomoossi@yahoo.com •

INTRODUCTION

English is now considered as a global language of science and almost all universities all over the world now offer courses in English. Most EFL (English as a Foreign Language) countries are now trying to keep up with the world trend but their national language is basically different from English, as far as their culture, script, etc are concerned. However, the need to communicate scientifically among academicians is inevitable; therefore, the language of scientists will continue to remain English for an unknown but long duration. In fact, English is no longer a foreign language since it has turned into an international language common to all nations (1).

Earlier studies have focused on challenges and barriers in *ESL* contexts in meeting the increasing diversity of the health care system (2); although the issue is deeply attended, a quantitative analysis is finally recommended to investigate the positive correlation between improved language acquisition and academic success of ESL nursing students (2). However, in *EFL* settings, particularly in Iran, its communicative role has been ignored at the expense of naturalization and translation (3). The use of English in the Iranian context is limited as a foreign language while the official language is *Persian* – a right-to-left language with an Arabic alphabet which is totally different from English in appearance and syntax.

University education in Iran is divided into two categories: non-medical and medical. The former, i.e. non-medical majors, are diverse and include humanities, engineering, basic sciences, etc. Medical education is meant to train students in medicine, dentistry, pharmacy and paramedical fields including nursing, midwifery, health, etc. There is a nationally approved curriculum for each major, and all 49 medical universities offer the same courses throughout the semester.

Among credit courses, English courses are designed for improving the students' knowledge of English mainly to improve the reading comprehension skills: *Pre-university English* (two hours a week) for those who score below 50% in the national university entrance exam; *General English* (three hours a week) for familiarizing students with medical texts and more common terminology; *Medical English* (two hours a week) for developing the knowledge of medical terminology, affixes and roots, longer texts, etc. The order of the English courses is as stated above (4); they criticize the current order and methods of ELT (English Language Teaching) in medical universities, contending that over-reliance on the reading comprehension and grammar has led the learners toward a passive role in a way that they are barely able to even read medical texts in an acceptable manner and speed. Other scholars have also noted the weak performance of EFL students in reading comprehension (5, 6). Therefore, a revolutionary change is required to alter the current trends in medical ELT. However, an evaluation of the current situation as well as obtaining the views of the *learners* and *graduates* of the current educational system can shed a light on the future changes of the ELT education. Changes can involve the inclusion of other skills like writing and speaking in the ELT programs; for instance, the development of an academic writing course for nurses has been stressed (7). Also, moving from book-oriented skills (i.e. reading) toward more socially-oriented skills (i.e. speaking and writing) (8) as well as extracurricular language learning activities can be the options to enhance the current system of medical ELT (9). To sum up, the current status of ELT in medical universities in Iran requires a considerable revision of the course design, nursing profession needs analysis and teaching methods aligned with those needs.

Nurses among other medical professions are expected and need to communicate in one way or another in English too. Below, we will report a study conducted on *nurses* (the output of the current system of education who face the needs of the workplace) and *students of nursing* (who need to prepare to face the workplace) to investigate their views and perspectives on the efficacy of the national English program at medical universities in three major areas: *general usage, medical usage, and research usage*. It is conceived that students of nursing are currently taking these courses to use them in future, and that nurses have already taken them and are experiencing the workplace requirements now; therefore, their views on the efficacy of the current program can guide us into two roads: the wider the gap between their views, the more urgent the revision of the program; the smaller the gap, the more hopeful we can be about the future of the program. In short, this study will highlight the gap between the views of *students of nursing* and *nurse practitioners*.

EXAMINEES AND METHODS

This descriptive analytical study included 130 students of nursing (who had taken and passed all three English courses in their major) and 167 professional nurses. The study was conducted in Sabzevar, Iran; the participants were selected through randomized clustered sampling. They were asked to fill out a questionnaire including demographic information (age, gender, degree, etc) and 31 Likert questions on the effectiveness of the current ELT programs in medical universities.

The questions were arranged in three areas: *General English* usage, *Medical English* usage and *Research* usage (See *Appendix One* for details). The questionnaire was designed on the basis of earlier experiences of the researchers as well as a review of the related literature; it was validated through content analysis and expert judgment by nurses and nurse educators. A Cronbach's alpha of 0.85 was computed in order to attain reliability of the tool. Data were analyzed in SPSS 11.5 using descriptive and non-parametric statistics.

RESULTS

The participants of the study were 167 nurses (56%) and 130 students of nursing (44%). Overall, 25.6% were men and the rest were women (74.4%). The obtained data were found to be non-normal with the use of Kolmogorov-Smirnov test and histogram; therefore, non-parametric tests were used for data analysis.

The questions were rated on a Likert basis, and the values of 1-5 corresponded to *Very little* (1), *Little* (2), *Average* (3), *Much* (4) and *Very much* (5). As there were 31 questions in the questionnaire, the total and maximum effectiveness of instruction could have been 155 (31 questions x 5=155); the maximum efficacy of the *General* usage, the *Medical* usage and the *Research* usage were expected to be 50 (10 questions x 5=50), 45 (9 questions x 5=45) and 60 (12 questions x 5= 60), respectively.

Total Efficacy Judgment

The responses were scored for each section, and the total of each section highlighted the effectiveness of instruction in that section as judged by participants. For example, they estimated the efficacy of EFL instruction in the *General English* section to be 25.7306 ±8.29288 (out of 50), the *Medical English* to be 21.1434±7.40024 (out of 45), and the *Research usage* to be 24.6496±11.56735 (out of 60) (Table 1).

It is interesting to point out that the percentile 90 of all sections rendered a very low total score; for example, 90% of the participants judged the efficacy of each component to be 37.31 and 39.5 for *General, Medical* and *Research* sections respectively, implying that the majority considered EFL instruction to be not so effective for the present age considerations.

Table 1. *Efficacy of the EFL instruction in three major sections as judged by participants*

	Mean±SD	Range	Percentile 90	Percentile 70	Percentile 50
General	25.7306 ± 8.29288	10-50	37	31	25
Medical	21.1434 ± 7.40024	9-45	31	30	20
Research	24.6496 ± 11.56735	12-60	39.5	25	24

A Wide Gap

Students and nurses provided different evaluation of the current ELT programs for the *General* usage. In other words, students considered it to be ineffective while nurses considered it as effective. In fact, their views were significantly different as shown by Mann-Whitney U test (P=0.002).

Also, there was a significant difference in the views of students and nurses in evaluating the current ELT programs in the Research usage of English. In other words, students considered it to be ineffective while nurses considered it as effective. In fact, their views were significantly different as shown by Mann-Whitney U test (P=0.00).

However, there was no significant difference in the views of students and nurses in evaluating the current ELT programs in the Medical usage of English. In other words, their views were not significantly different as shown by Mann-Whitney U test (P=0.553).

Gender-oriented Judgment

As for gender, the effectiveness of the current ELT programs was not so differently judged by male and female participants. Males considered the *Research* usa-

ge to be more affected by the current programs, but females did not think so; however, the difference of views was not statistically significant (P=0.019).

DISCUSSION

The present study delved into the perspectives of the nurses and students of nursing in a major university (i.e. Sabzevar University of Medical Sciences) in Iran to evaluate the efficacy of ELT programs. The results indicated a wide gap between the views of nurses and students, particularly with the general and research uses of English.

The general usage of English in Iranian universities is mainly related to Translating English texts, Using monolingual dictionaries, Managing correspondence in English, Developing vocabulary, Understanding word roots and affixes, Reading comprehension, Knowledge of English Grammar, Managing oral conversations in English, Listening comprehension, and Understanding English movies (as indicated in *Appendix One*). In this regard, extracurricular courses are suggested for improving the conversational skills (9); also, a similar result was found when investigating 68 nurse students who were given a writing prompt to complete in English and to speak ab-

out the topic; the results indicated their lower ability and the need for an intensive writing course (7).

However, the research usage refers to Understanding English lectures, Presenting conferences in English, Writing research articles, Writing article abstracts, Writing resumes and CVs, Translating articles from English, Translating books from English, Reading the instructions of new medical equipment, Surfing the web, Using newer versions of software, Writing e-mails in English, and Searching with effective key words in English (as indicated in *Appendix One*). Moving from desktops to the heart of the classrooms, a student-centered approach is suggested in developing the English proficiency of the medical practitioners in general (10).

Considering the differences in views with respect to gender, the results are not significant because the number of male and female participants were not equal; there were three times more female participants, compared to male. Males considered the *Research* usage to be more affected by the current programs but females did not think so. This can be attributed to the concern of men to follow research interests more on a personal basis and we propose this as a potential research area for further study.

All in all, we can consider these uses as basic steps in joining the global community of English users and speakers. In other words, nurses find themselves as weak users of English while students of nursing have no such clear idea of their future demands. Therefore, the very first thing coming to the mind is that the courses offered at the university level do not rigorously match with the future professional requirements of the practitioners; hence, a major revision is compulsory. In short, the speed of knowledge transfer and use will be lowered if the trend does not stop, and if ELT programs are not revised to keep up with the global trends. Despite the fact that the recruitment, admission, retention, and graduation of proficient nurses are essential to provide the workforce to meet the demands of a multicultural community in ESL contexts (11), in EFL environments such as Iran, this might not be compulsory. Currently, the majority of university students find themselves at a disadvantage in reading comprehension, for instance, because of false feelings of knowing English. However, the current status of English as an International Language (EIL) puts further commands on university graduates. Most applicants are expected to pass a challenging English interview for job opportunities. In other words, what the workplace requires is *different* from prior university training; nurses are expected to take care of foreign patients (e.g. in Shiraz and Mashad hospitals), to manage job interviews when emigrating to other countries, and to know English when traveling abroad. In certain cases, they need to provide a credible certificate (e.g. TOEFL and IELTS) for their employers too.

The problem at Iranian medical universities becomes worse when the three major English courses offered suffer from being *mis*-organized under an accepted course design, theoretical background and instructional recommendations (4). For example, the Pre-university and General English courses encourage the students to focus on reading comprehension; in the market, the course books are diverse, and instructors are not normally given clear instructions and training on methods of teaching and lesson plans. In fact, the two-credit Medical English follows the same route; accordingly, the students learn no more than literal translation, lexical equivalence and simple exercises in English.

In conclusion, based on the results as well as the experiences of the researchers from the Iranian learners of English at medical universities, a feeling of inefficiency will remain as long as the revision is ignored. Therefore, a closer look at the possibility of English language development issues (12) and revision of the overt, hidden and null curricula (13) is recommended. Based on a democratic perspective on language planning (14), an advantage of the present study is that the results originated in the views of two groups of respondents: *nurses* who have completed their education and meet the workplace professional requirements of English usage and *students of nursing* who are taking the courses and rely on their conjectures about professional demands of their need to use English in future. Also, cooperation of ELT professionals with nurse educators (15) is suggested to improve the quality of English language education in the nursing profession.

Appendix One - The Questionnaire

How much do you think the current methods of teaching English in medical universities have contributed to your knowledge in the following areas?

General English usage

	Questions	Very little	Little	Average	Much	Very much	Total
1	Translating English texts	1	2	3	4	5	
2	Using monolingual dictionaries	1	2	3	4	5	
3	Managing correspondence in English	1	2	3	4	5	
4	Developing vocabulary	1	2	3	4	5	
5	Understanding word roots and affixes	1	2	3	4	5	
6	Reading comprehension	1	2	3	4	5	
7	Knowledge of English Grammar	1	2	3	4	5	
8	Managing oral conversations in English	1	2	3	4	5	
9	Listening comprehension	1	2	3	4	5	
10	Understanding English movies	1	2	3	4	5	

Medical English usage

	Questions	Very little	Little	Average	Much	Very much	Total
11	Using Medical dictionaries	1	2	3	4	5	
12	Understanding medical terminology	1	2	3	4	5	
13	Using medical abbreviations	1	2	3	4	5	
14	Managing medical conversations in English	1	2	3	4	5	
15	Effective communication with patients of other nationalities	1	2	3	4	5	
16	Effective communication with colleagues of other nationalities	1	2	3	4	5	
17	Medical translation	1	2	3	4	5	
18	Reading medical textbooks in English	1	2	3	4	5	
19	Reading medical reports and patients' history	1	2	3	4	5	

English Usage in research

	Questions	Very little	Little	Average	Much	Very much	Total
20	Understanding English lectures	1	2	3	4	5	
21	Presenting conferences in English	1	2	3	4	5	
22	Writing research articles	1	2	3	4	5	
23	Writing article abstracts	1	2	3	4	5	
24	Writing resumes and CVs	1	2	3	4	5	
25	Translating articles from English	1	2	3	4	5	
26	Translating books from English	1	2	3	4	5	
27	Reading the instructions of new medical equipment	1	2	3	4	5	
28	Surfing the web	1	2	3	4	5	
29	Using newer versions of software	1	2	3	4	5	
30	Writing e-mails in English	1	2	3	4	5	
31	Searching with effective key words in English	1	2	3	4	5	

References

1. Rivers JD. English as an International Business Language (EIBL): The Need for an Increase in Theoretical and Practical Research Focusing on Written Business Communications across Cultural Boundaries in Relation to Multinational Corporate Language Selection. *Asian ESP Journal 2008;* 4(2): 6-22. Available online at http://asian-esp-journal.com/July_2008_Ebook.pdf

2. Choi LL. Literature review: issues surrounding education of English-as-a-Second Language (ESL) nursing students. J Transcult Nurs 2005*;*16(3):263-8. http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1043659605274966 PMid:15980054

3. Shomoossi N & Ketabi S. A Critical look at the concept of authenticity. Electronic Journal of Foreign Language Teaching 2007; 4(1): 149-155. Retrieved online from http://e-flt.nus.edu.sg/v4n12007/shomoossi.pdf

4. Mozayyan MR, Mazloomi SS, & Asgarshahi M. Viewpoints of students of Shahid Sadooghi University of Medical Sciences on the order of Pre-university and general English courses. Iran J Med Educa 2005; 5(1): 89-90. Online document available in http://www.ijme.ir/article-A-10-1-73-1-fa.html [Persian]

5. Farhady H, Sajadi Hezaveh F, and Hedayati H. Reflections on Foreign Language Education in Iran. TESL-EJ 2010; 13(4): 1-18. Available online at http://www.teslej.org/wordpress/issues/volume13/ej52/ej52a1/

6. Dolati I, Mikaili P. Opinions related to the main reasons on Iranian Students' difficulties in Spoken English proficiency. Aust J Basic Applied Sci 2011;5(11): 1142-1148. Available online at http://www.insipub.com/ajbas/2011/November-2011/1142-1148.pdf

7. Gimenez J. Academic Writing in Nursing: Genres, Marking Criteria and Course Design. Asian ESP J 2008; 4(2):23-34. Available online at http://asian-esp-journal.com/July_2008_Ebook.pdf

8. Miyake M, & Tremarco J. Needs analysis for nursing students: utilizing questionnaires and interviews. Kawasaki J Med Sci 2005; 11(1): 23-34. Available online at http://www.kawasakim.ac.jp/soc/mw/journal/en/2005-e11-1/03_miyake.pdf

9. Lieske C. Japanese Nursing College Students' Use of English Outside of the Classroom. Asian ESP Journal 2007; 3(2): 83-97. Available online at http://asian-espjournal.com/November_2007_E_book.pdf

10. Chang JP. Teacher's Role in Teaching English for Medical Purposes (EMP). Sino-US English Teaching 2007; 4(7): 1-7. Available online at http://www.ceps.com.tw/ec/ecjnlarticleView.aspx?jnlcattype=1&jnlptype=1&jnltype=1&jnliid=3426&issueiid=54657&atliid=914680

11. Abriam-Yago K, Yoder M, Kataoka-Yahiro M. The Cummins Model: A Framework for Teaching Nursing Students for Whom English is a Second Language. J Transcult Nurs 1999; 10(2):143-9. http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/104365969901000208 PMid:10476166

12. Abolhassani SM. The Impact of English Language Development (ELD) on English learning (Case Study in

Tehran language schools). Life Sci J 2012; 9(3):465-74.

13. Assemi A, & Sheikhzade M. Intended, implemented and experiential null curriculum. Life Sci J 2013; 10(1):82-85.

14. Pishghadam R, & Saboori F. Linguistic Democracy in English Language Teaching. Life Sci J 2012; 9(2):297-306.

15. Shomoossi N. Collaboration of Translators with Medical Authors: A Qualitative Enquiry into Writing Articles in English. Acta Facultatis Medicae Naissensis 2013; 30 (1):45-47. Available online at
http://www.degruyter.com/view/j/afmnai.2013.30.issue-1/v10283-012-0035-1/v10283-012-0035-1.xml
http://dx.doi.org/10.2478/v10283-012-0035-1

EFIKASNOST PROGRAMA IZ ENGLESKOG JEZIKA PROCENJENA OD STRANE MEDICINSKIH SESTARA I STUDENATA STRUKOVNIH STUDIJA ZA MEDICINSKE SESTRE: DA LI BI MEDICINSKE SESTRE U IRANU TREBALO DA ZNAJU ENGLESKI JEZIK?

Nematullah Shomoossi[1], Mostafa Rad[2], Mohammad Hasan Rakhshani[3]

[1]Departman za engleski jezik, Sabzevar Univerzitet medicinskih nauka, Sabzevar, Iran
[2]Departman za postdiplomske studije, Fakultet za strukovne studije za medicinske sestre i akušerstvo, Mashhad Univerzitet medicinskih nauka, Mashhad, Iran
[3]Departman za statistiku, Sabvezar Univerzitet medicinskih nauka, Sabvezar, Iran

S a ž e t a k

Kao i ostali medicinski radnici i medicinske sestre bi trebalo da poznaju engleski jezik. Ova studija će prikazati stavove medicinskih sestara i studenata strukovnih studija za medicinske sestre o efikasnosti programa iz engleskog jezika na iranskim medicinskim univerzitetima u trima velikim oblastima: opšta upotreba, upotreba u oblasti medicine i upotreba engleskog jezika u istraživačke svrhe.

Ova deskriptivna studija je uključila 130 studenata strukovnih studija za medicinske sestre i 167 medicinskih sestara koji su izabrani metodom slučajnog uzorka. Studija je sprovedena u Subvezaru u Iranu. Od učesnika se tražilo da popune upitnik koji je sadržao demografske podatke i 31 Likertovo pitanje o efikasnosti programa za učenje engleskog jezika na medicinskim univerzitetima.

Učesnici su procenili da efikasnost podučavanja engleskog kao stranog jezika u oblasti Opšta upotreba engleskog jezika iznosi 25.7306±8.29288 (od 50); efiksnost u delu Upotreba engleskog jezika u oblasti medicine iznosila je 21.1434±7.40024 (od 45), a za istraživačke svrhe 24.6496±11.56735 (od 60), što je ukazivalo na velike razlike. Međutim, u opisivanju efikasnosti aktuelnih programa za učenje engleskog jezika nije bilo većih razlika u stavovima između ispitanika ženskog i muškog pola. Muški ispitanici su smatrali da na upotrebu engleskog jezika u oblasti istraživanja utiču aktuelni programi, dok ženske ispitanice nisu mislile tako. Međutim, razlika u stavovima nije bila statistički značajna (P=0.019).

Generalno, rezultati su pokazali da postoji velika razlika u stavovima medicinskih sestara i studenata strukovnih studija za medicinske sestre o efikasnosti programa za učenje engleskog jezika na medicinskim univerzitetima u Iranu. Stoga, potrebno je uvesti neke promene kako bi se kod medinskih sestara dostigao nivo znanja engleskog jezika kao opšteg sredstva komunikacije danas u svetu.

Ključne reči: engleski jezik, osnovne strukovne studije za medicinske sestre, obrazovanje, nacrt programa, analiza potreba