English for Nursing Purposes: A Needs Assessment for Professional-Oriented Curriculum Design

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ABSTRACT

Over the last two decades, ESP (English for Specific Purposes) has been viewed by many English scholars and teachers as having significant effects on meeting students' career needs. Based on this recognition, we conjecture that English for Nursing Purposes (ENP) can have similar functions in vocational nursing programs. Our long term goal is to design appropriate curricula for ENP. Most of all, a needs assessment is an indispensable first step. This research explores for what purposes the students use English in nursing and medical fields. Furthermore, what language skills do they need to possess or need to strenghten? What implications can be obtained as guidelines in ENP courses? To acquire an overall picture of students' needs, two groups of students were asked to respond a questionnaire. One group consisted of full-time students who have no vocational working experience in nursing. The needs of this group were characterized as 'expectation needs.' The other group was comprised with in-service students in evening classes, who had day-time jobs in nursing. Their needs were characterized as ' in-service needs '. In contrast, we examined if there were any distinctive needs between these two groups. Findings of the survey reveal that most of the students have a positive attitude toward ESP courses, and there is only a slight discrepancy between the two groups in what they need for ESP. The categories of task items and language components were identified, assessed, and ranked. These research results can be used to build up the pedagogical framework of ENP.

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INTRODUCTION

As the demand for developing a curriculum to meet students' career needs grows, ESP has been playing an increasingly important role in facilitating students' preparation for professional requirements, training, and study. Nursing and medical work adopts many concepts, descriptions, and terminology in English. Advanced study requires sufficient English ability in technical areas. Over recent years, there has been an increase in the number of foreigners who come to work and live in Taiwan for longer periods of time. There are more and more requirements and opportunities for nurses to actually use English in their career tasks. As Robinson (1984) indicates, the demand for ESP was considered as a socioeconomic phenomenon. Therefore, it is important for nursing students to have access to ENP courses, especially those who may work in big cities.

In general, students in two-year junior nursing colleges have received approximately six years of general English instruction during high school years. Most of the instruction consists of lessons on the traditional grammar translation method, and is literature-based. The main concern of students in such a setting is to pass the entrance examination of vocational junior colleges. In other words, they have rather few chances to learn ENP. On the other hand, ENP is essentially a matter of specializing English for nursing and medical areas, and the specialization is used as the course specification to impart to students necessary language competence to cope with nursing and medical work. The ENP course, for instance, prepares students for such job-related English as terminology and medical abbreviations that they will use in daily career tasks.

As Robinson (1983) makes the crucial point, an ESP course focuses on facilitating more successful performance in professional roles, and it is based on a rigorous analysis of students' needs and should be 'tailor-made'. This entails that a needs assessment is an indispensable first step toward the curriculum design of ENP. To acquire a better understanding of students' needs in ENP, a questionnaire study was conducted and informal consultations with students were employed. Based upon the needs assessment, recommendations can be made for the ENP curriculum design. The aim of the research is to explore the following issues:

1. To which extent do students need an ENP course? What implications can be obtained for the instructor to design an ENP curriculum?

2. What are the purposes for which students use English in nursing work? Further, to categorize the needful items and rank them according to the frequency of usage.

3. What language skills, in particular, will the students need to develop or retain in order to perform their professional tasks and study?

Learning is much more effective when instructional contents match students' needs. We hope to contribute to this goal by identifying specific needs of students in two-year junior college of nursing and by suggesting itemized course contents toward designing a successful, customized ENP course.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

For a long while, there have been a wide variety of the definitions of ESP. Many people feel interested in the question, 'What is ESP?' However, there has been little consensus attained on the definitions. In brief, as Widdowson (1983) claims, ESP signifies professional-oriented teaching or learning of English. It is given as an intensive training course and is based on the identifiable group needs. Also, Robinson (1984) pinpoints that it is essentially a means for achieving the necessary competence, but not an end in itself. Earlier in 1980, Strevens proposed the working definition of ESP as follows:

ESP instruction is

    I.   devised to meet learners' particular needs;

    II.   related in themes and topics to occupations or areas of study;

    III. selective ,opposed to general, as to language contents;

    IV. constrained to language skills.

Another complicated question is 'What is the difference between ESP and GPE (General Purpose English)?' Widdowson (1983) suggests that GPE, as opposed to ESP, is essentially an educational operation that seeks to offer learners a general capacity in dealing with 'undefined eventualities' in the future. Put briefly, ESP adopts specification of objectives which are equivalent to aims, whereas GPE takes on specification of objectives which leads to aims. Further, ESP is a training which focuses on the development of specialized competence, while

GPE is an education which seeks to develop general capacity. Also, Hutchinson and Waters (1991) claims that it is a 'definable need' to use English which distinguishes ESP from GPE, and an ESP course is characterized by its content (e.g. Medicine). These powerful notions of ESP draw a lot of attention, but the debate continues.

Quite a few ESP researches conducted in Taiwan have elicited some remarkable implications for the local development of ESP.　Huang (1997) indicates that currently ESP is integrated into university curricula only to a very limited extent, yet her research data suggest that ESP is considered as crucial by the majority of freshmen, graduates, language instructors and content instructors. A study by Huang (1990) explores the ESP instructional methods. In addition, several researchers have engaged in needs analysis for curriculum and syllabus design. For example, the research findings of Shieh and Wu (1988) have shown that more than half of freshmen at the National Tsinghua University preferred to have general English courses for their freshman year. This suggests that ESP is better conducted on the later stage of students' professional training. Most of ESP researches in Taiwan have targeted in the fields of science, technology and business (Kuo, 1987). Only a few have considered ESP in the filed of medicine. For example, Fang (1987) examined the attitudes of students in Kaoshiung College of Medicine toward English learning and the rank of difficulty of the four language skills. He reported that 80 percents of these students chose GPE as the first-year English course. Interestingly, the competence of hearing is regarded as the most important and difficult by these students in the school of medicine. Also, Fang (1985) investigated teaching methods for medical terminology. Our research focuses on needs assessment for nursing purposes. We assess the attitudes toward offering ESP. We identify and rank the categories of professional needs and needful language components. Compared with the research by Fong, the scope of this study has apparently been narrowed down and geared toward the exploration of teaching English for Nursing Purposes.

METHODS

To obtain an overall picture of students' needs in ENP (English for Nursing Purposes), we consider both the 'expectation needs' and the 'practice, or in-service needs' of students (Mackay & Bosquet, 1981). The expectation needs are interpreted as hypothetical because they are expressed by the full-time students with no working experience in nursing. On the other

hand, in-service students provide viewpoints based on practical job performance. Therefore, one group of each type was selected to respond to a questionnaire.

Subjects

The subjects participating in the research were two groups of first-year students in the two-year Nursing Program of Kang-Ning Junior College. One group (Group A; N=181) was made up with full-time students. These students had learned GPE for three years in vocational high schools of nursing. The other group (Group B; N=198) consisted of in-service students who had nursing jobs during the day time and studied in evening classes. A little more than five percents of them had taken English for medicine and nursing as either required or elective before. At time of the research, all of them had to take GPE as a required course. In addition, all of their instructors did not employ field-specific authentic English texts as textbooks or teaching materials. The majority of the full-time students were around twenty years of age, whereas the age of in-service students ranges from twenty-one to fifty-one. Most of them have worked in nursing fields for more than three years (3.71 years on an average). It is highly significant to assess the in-service needs from these well-experienced nurses.

Instrument

The instrument used in this research was a questionnaire with four parts. The first part contained four open-ended questions concerning respondents' working status, the number of years of working experience, and whether or not they had taken ENP before. The second part consisted of seven statements on the Likert scale to elicit students' beliefs and attitudes. The third part with 20 listed items was designed to examine categories and frequencies of English use in nursing. Finally, the fourth part sought to rank the importance of the language components used in ENP. The survey questionnaire was administered to the two groups of students by two GPE teachers at the end of the first semester, in January, 1997.

Data Collection

All of the needed data for the research were gathered by using a survey questionnaire.

Responses were classified to a five point scale (1) strongly disagree (2) disagree (3) no ideas (4) agree (5) strongly agree. Scores were ranked from one to five. Higher scores represent more agreement. A total of 414 students were asked to fill out the questionnaires anonymously in GPE classes. After examining the questionnaires, there were 181 valid questionnaires from Group A and 198 from Group B. Questionnaires containing multiple responses on a single question and ignored questions are excluded. Before the third and the fourth parts of the questionnaire were constructed, students were asked to answer open-ended questions about what purposes they used English for in nursing tasks and what language components they perceived as needful. Based upon their responses, categories of purposes and language components were listed on the questionnaire. Later, they were asked to rank top ten listed items in each set.

Data Analysis

For the quantitative analysis of the data, SPSS for Window, a popular statistical software was used to obtain survey indicators. Descriptive statistics, such as frequency, means, and standard deviation, were calculated to summarize students' responses to ENP needs. Categorical items were ranked based on their mean values to show the relative strength of individual ENP needs. Both Spearman and Pearson correlation coefficients were calculated to estimate the inter-relationship between responses from students who have working experience and students who have no working experience.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Data drawn from the two groups were contrasted, interpreted, and discussed. Most of all, the results will be considered in three sections: general perception of the needs for ENP, the perceived importance of individual need categories and their rank order, and the perceived importance of the needful language components and their rank order. Tables were also presented to foster reading and understanding for the results of quantitative data. To make the presentation concise, the translation from Chinese on the questionnaire was considerably simplified.

On the questionnaire, the statistical analysis of the second part was enhanced by pairs of relevant items according to the parallel forms reliability technique (Grimm & Woznaik, 1990). That is to say, a concept or a topic was examined at two different points on a questionnaire. The respondents should answer the two items in a similar manner at the same period of time. Data collected from the responses to the seven statements in the second part was quantified with descriptive statistics. Table 1 shows the results on strength of students' perceived needs.

Table 1: Strength of Perceived Needs

statement	mean	standard deviation	percentageSA	A	N	D	SD
A	3.50	0.87	20.8	34.5	32.1	9.5	3.1
	4.06	1.02	35.1	39.5	18.7	4.9	1.8
B	3.30	0.87	15.4	30.4	30.9	15.4	7.9
	3.70	1.14	18.5	40.7	32.2	5.3	3.3
C	2.35	0.84	6.1	17.1	20.8	41.6	14.4
	2.58	1.11	3.7	6.1	18.5	65.4	6.3
D	2.97	0.93	9.1	22.0	38	19	11.9
	3.26	1.12	18.5	46.9	23.4	9.8	1.4
E	3.91	0.81	34.5	36.3	16.6	10.1	2.5
	4.61	1.06	59.2	32.1	4.9	2.5	1.3
F	2.95	0.91	5.4	26.2	29.4	28.6	10.4
	3.83	1.07	23.5	44.6	22.7	5.7	3.5
G	3.00	1.06	11.9	26.8	25.6	20.8	14.9
	3.23	1.25	12.3	27.2	38.3	16.1	6.1

☐ full-time students without working experience   N = 181

▨ in-service students in evening classes   N = 198

SA = strongly agree, A = agree, N = no ideas, D = disagree, SD = strongly disagree

A, E – attitude,   B, F – communication,   D, G – professional study

As for the needs to take an ESP course, Statement A and Statement E, were designed to estimate their attitudes toward ESP. More than seventy-four percents (74.6%) of the full time students agreed or strongly agree that they should take an ESP course. In contrast, about fifty-five percents (55.3%) of the in-service students agreed or strongly agreed and thirty-two of them were unsure. Significantly, the full-time students have more positive attitude toward an ESP course. In Statement E, students were asked whether they applied ENP in daily career tasks. More than ninety percents (91.3%) of the full-time students agreed or strongly agreed at this statement. However, the number dropped lower in the group of the in-service students. It was about seventy percents (70.8%) of them who agreed or strongly agreed.

Another pair of statements, B and F, focused on ENP for communication. In Statement B, nearly fifty-nine percents of the full-time students believed they felt the needs to use ENP to communicate with others in their jobs. On the contrary, only 45.8% of the in-service students agreed or strongly agreed. In particular, students were asked if they would encounter foreigners in their working areas. Interestingly, only one third of in-service students claimed it was likely to work with or take care of foreigners. Yet, there were sixty-eight percents of the full-time students perceived this possibility.

The last pair of statements, D and G, are concerned with ESP for professional study, either self-advanced or academic. Slightly above sixty-five percents of the full-time students believed they need ESP for professional study. Yet, only thirty-one percents of the in-service students agreed or strongly agreed they could use ESP for professional study.

In general, there was an obvious tendency that full-time students perceived a stronger need for ENP than in-service students did. It was very likely that the need difference came from the distinctive characteristics of these two groups of students. In-service students were mostly aged around 30 to 40, who had settled in their current working environments and had less opportunity of career advances. On the other hand, most full-time students were aged around 20, who had not started their nursing career. It seemed that these students had higher expectation in their future nursing career, such as advanced study abroad and/or better jobs. As a result, they revealed higher motivation and need for ENP.

Table 2: Categories Ranked by Perceived Needs

rank	category	mean	SD	rank	category	mean	SD
1	C doctor orders	7.61	3.34	1	C doctor orders	6.42	3.73
2	D cf. complaints & symptoms	5.65	3.34	2	D cf. complaints & symptoms	5.91	3.49
3	I medical & nursing terminology	5.12	3.49	3	I medical & nursing terminology	4.50	3.38
4	B diagnosis_reports	4.10	3.31	4	B diagnosis_reports	4.10	3.42
5	E names of medicine	3.77	3.60	5	L nursing procedures	3.95	3.79
6	L nursing procedures	3.65	3.33	6	R ways in greeting and comforting	3.67	3.27
7	H prefixes and suffixes	3.19	3.37	7	E names of medicine	3.58	3.43
8	S English Abb. in nursing	3.11	3.00	8	H prefixes and suffixes	3.14	3.17
9	P conversation in OPD	2.86	3.24	9	P conversation in OPD	2.61	3.45
10	R ways in greeting and comforting	2.54	2.92	10	S English Abb. in nursing	2.72	2.91
11	J patient education	2.21	3.12	11	K forms completing in English	2.45	3.19
12	G manuel of apparatus, supplies	2.15	2.94	12	J patient education	2.43	2.96
13	K forms completing in English	1.72	2.68	13	A direction and location of facilities	2.09	3.16
14	O nursing assessment & projects	1.66	2.30	14	G manuel of apparatus, supplies	1.55	2.64
15	Q orders for foreign nursing assistants	1.65	2.39	15	Q orders for foreign nursing assistants	1.36	2.37
16	A direction and location of facilities	1.42	2.62	16	N briefing of equipment	1.20	2.15
17	M professional reading	0.84	1.85	17	O nursing assessment & projects	1.15	2.21
18	N briefing of equipment	0.83	2.12	18	F medicine directory	1.01	2.17
19	F medicine directory	0.31	1.21	19	M professional reading	0.81	1.96

☐ full-time students without working experience   N = 181

▨ in-service students in evening classes   N = 198

Spearman rank correlation   r = 0.946   (p < 0.001)

Pearson rank correlation   r = 0.955   (p < 0.001)

Professional needs for ENP were categorized into nineteen specific task items, which were elicited from students' responses to open-ended questions beforehand. Each student was asked to rank 10 most important items. The response was coded by converting the first rank item to the value of 10, the second rank item to the value of 9, the third rank item to the value of 8, and

so on. Table 2 shows the statistical results, where the averaged value was interpreted as the strength of importance of each task item perceived by the students.
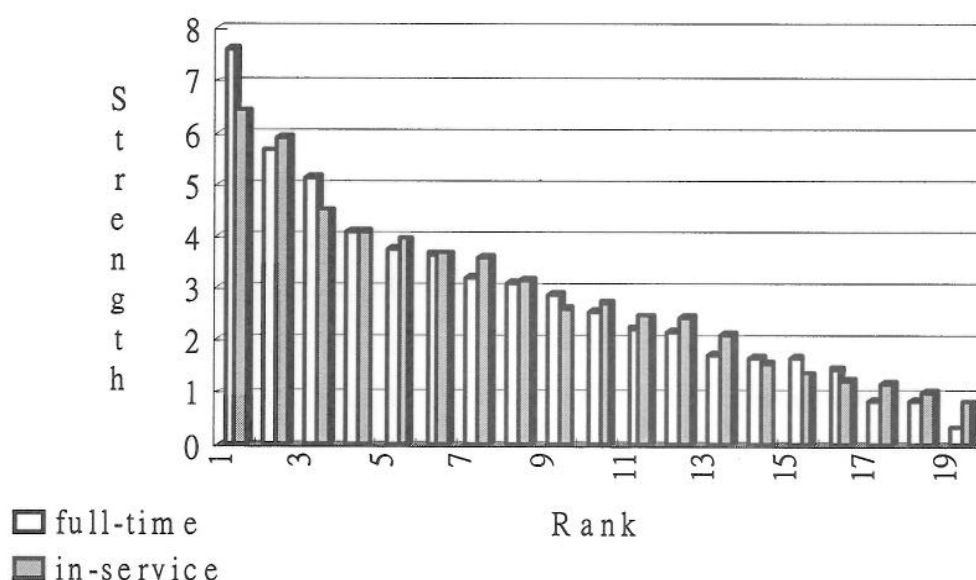

Figure 1: Strength Distribution of Categories of Perceived Needs

Both groups had the same ranking in the top four task items by the order of doctor orders, chief complaints & symptoms, terminology, and diagnosis reports. Full-time students seemed to express more importance for this group of task items than in-service students did. In particular, about 50% of full-time students ranked "doctor order" as the most important task item, comparing to 31% of in-service students. Although task items ranked after number 5 began to show some variation, their overall ranking viewed by these two groups of students still seemed to be pretty much coincide with each other (Spearman rank correlation $r = 0.946$, $p < 0.001$.) In fact, the top ten task items between these two groups were identical, although not exactly in the same order. The overall pair comparison in strength of importance of task items also revealed high consistency (Pearson correlation $r = 0.955$, $p < 0.001$.) However, it was noted that the strength of importance assessed by in-service students tended to be more 'spread out' across task items (as shown in Figure 1). This may be due to the diverse working experiences of in-service students. Finally, the overall statistics seemed to support the coherent identification of some important task items for ENP.

The perceived importance of the needful language components and their rank order were analyzed in a similar way. ENP components were categorized into eleven specific items, which were also elicited from students' responses to open-ended questions in advance. Each student was asked to rank 10 most needful items. The response was coded by converting the first rank item to the value of 10, the second rank item to the value of 9, the third rank item to the value of

Table 3: Language Components Ranked by Received Needs

rank	category	mean	SD	rank	category	mean
1	J competence in conversation	6.37	2.51	1	I listening comprehension	7.36
2	I listening comprehension	6.28	2.29	2	J competence in conversation	7.29
3	A vocabulary	6.02	2.91	3	F phonics	5.48
4	C terminology	5.36	2.99	4	G reading comprehension in professional texts	5.27
5	G reading comprehension in professional texts	5.33	2.86	5	C terminology	5.13
6	F phonics	5.08	3.74	6	K brief oral presentation or introduction	4.82
7	E grammar	4.87	3.13	7	A vocabulary	4.69
8	B decoding meaning of words by word roots	4.73	2.47	8	E grammar	4.3
9	K brief oral presentation or introduction	4.36	2.96	9	B decoding meaning of words by word roots	3.79
10	D professional abbreviation	3.64	2.79	10	H writing competence	3.37
11	H writing competence	2.79	3.09	11	D professional abbreviation	3.35

☐ full-time students without working experience   N = 181

▨ in-service students in evening classes   N = 198

Pearson rank correlation   r = 0.829   (p < 0.01)

Spearman rank correlation   r = 0.809   (p < 0.01)

8, and so forth. Table 3 shows the statistical results, where the averaged value is interpreted as the strength of need of each skill item perceived by the students. The overall ranking viewed by these two groups of students exhibited more variation (Spearman rank correlation $r = 0.809$, p < 0.01.) Only the top two skill items between these two groups formed the same subset.
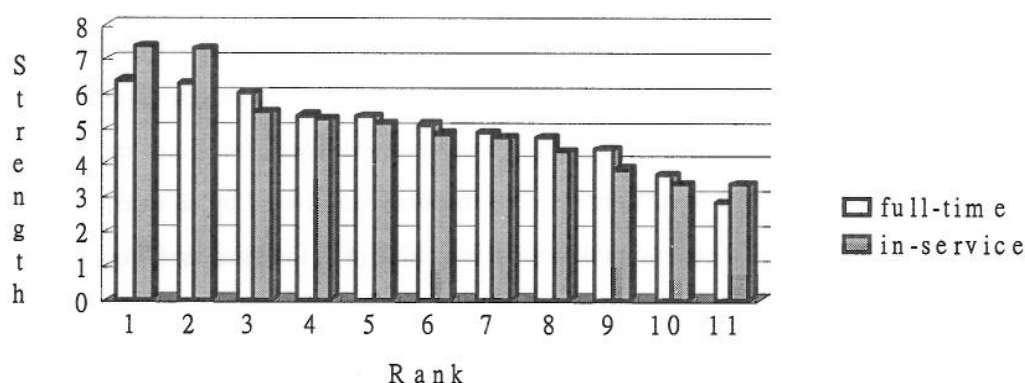
Figure 2: Strength Distribution of Perceived Needs of Language Components

Noticeably, the most important subset of (top four) task items, which required more skills on professional abbreviation, terminology and vocabulary, did not correspond exactly to the most needful subset of skill items. It was conjectured that two reasons contributed to this discrepancy. First, both groups of students had more or less picked up these skills in their current work or clinical practice, with in-service students showing more familiarity than full-time students had. Second, students' needful language skills might not be intended solely for professional purposes. For example, the top two language skill items viewed as the most needful were listening and conversation, which might have strong association with non-professional contexts such as watching English TV programs, seeing English movies, and travelling abroad. The overall pair comparison in strength of needful skill items showed some variation as well (Pearson correlation $r = 0.829$, $p < 0.01$.) In contrast, it was full-time students who exhibited more 'spread out' needs across skill items (as shown in Figure 2). This might indicate higher learning interest and diverse career plans of full-time students. Finally, the overall statistics seemed to help identify skills that should be focused in ENP courses.

CONCLUSION

The primary purpose of our research is to offer an insight into students' needs for ENP. Traditionally, it was believed that an ENP course should aim at teaching terminology and

prefixes/suffixes of medical terms to fulfill students' needs. Further, students in quite a few schools do not even have access to ENP courses. Our survey data show that a large majority of students in Kang Ning Junior College of Nursing have a positive attitude toward ESP. Full-time students are especially inclined to believe that they should take an ESP course. This may due to their concerns to be well prepared for their future career tasks. On the other hand, most of the in-service students have had steady jobs and have adapted to job-related English used in their tasks. Still, seventy percents of in-service students agreed or strongly agreed they need ENP in their daily career tasks. Noticeably, one third of in-service students claimed that they might work with or take care of foreigners. Some in-service students were informally consulted about the issue. A few of them pointed out that it might depend on geographical areas and on working departments. Nursing professionals working in the northern and the eastern districts of greater Taipei areas and in ER (emergency room) were more likely to encounter foreigners. Generally speaking, there was an obvious tendency that full-time students perceived a stronger need for ENP than in-service students did.

It is informative for instructors and administrators to be aware of the categories of important task items and their rank order. As suggested by Table 2, the top four task items are considered as more essential by both groups of students. These four items are doctor orders, chief complaints & symptoms, terminology, and diagnosis reports. As to the remaining task items, in-service students rated higher on such items as usage of English in description of nursing procedures, ways to express comforting and greeting, and conversation in OPD (outpatient department). On the other hand, full-time students are more interested in learning prefixes/suffixes of medical terms and English abbreviation in nursing. This may imply that in-service students are more concerned about using ENP in communication, whereas full-time students focus on more fundamental tasks. Therefore, it is suggested that ENP courses should be divided into three levels, the essential level, the communicative level and the advanced level. The essential level may include the contents and the skills of understanding doctor orders, chief complaints & symptoms, terminology and diagnosis reports. The communicative level may consist of conversation in OPD, nursing procedures, ways in comforting and greeting, filling out forms and keeping records. At last, the advanced level may contain critical reading in professional texts, briefing of equipment and work, and making nursing assessment & projects. As regard to language components, both groups of students seem to be more interested in

communicative competence since the top two components perceived as most important were competence in conversation and listening comprehension. Secondary to these two components, full-time students focus on job-related competence such as vocabulary learning, terminology, and reading comprehension in professional texts. In contrast, in-service students are more inclined to learn pronunciation, brief oral introduction and presentation. Some respondents pointed out that they hoped they could correctly pronounce terminology in English. When speaking in English, they thought they placed their pride on the line.

Through findings of this study, some pedagogical implications can be made for curriculum design. To fulfill students' needs for ESP, we can take the learner-centered approach proposed in Hutchinson and Waters (1991), and construct a hierarchy of skills and needful task items according to the results of this study. In essence, the top four task items should be instructed in context. Also, the usage of ENP in communication should be stressed in an ENP course, especially for in-service students because to some extent they have been acquainted with English at the essential level. Finally, there is a slightly different emphasis on instructional contents between these two groups. In-service students, for example, are more interested in reviewing phonics and learning critical reading, whereas full-time students are more concerned in learning medical terminology.

A number of issues should be taken into consideration in interpreting the results of this study. First, although students' needs were explicitly solicited in the survey, there may be discrepancy between student needs and their 'lacks'. Yet, as Hutchinson and Waters (1991) indicated, instructors should bear in mind the importance of learner motivation in the learning process. Therefore, learners' perceived wants cannot be ignored, either. Moreover, there are more foreigners in Taipei than any other places in Taiwan. In the survey, most of the in-service students work in Taipei, which may have an augmenting influence in their needs of using ESP in communicating with foreigners. Nevertheless, the results of our study are potentially useful for instructors and administrators in establishing a framework for a meaningful, fruitful ESP course.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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摘 要

在台灣隨著國際化的腳步加快，ESP(English for Specific Purposes)的需求與日俱增，正如 Robinson(1984)所言，ESP 需求的產生可視爲是社會經濟現象(scioeconomic phenomenon)，本研究以 ESP 的理論基礎作爲出發，探討在護理專業領域中，應用英文的目的以及所需的英文技巧，進一步期望能夠知道學習者的看法，和獲得教學上的意涵，作爲課程計劃和教學設計的參考。所採用的研究方法是問卷調查的方式。依據學習者的工作經驗，分爲兩組作爲對照，以檢視學習者的 expectation needs 和 in-service needs 的差異性，藉此取得對學習者需求的全面瞭解，研究結果提出學習者對 English for Nursing Purposes (ENP)的正負面意見，論文報告中，並且將所需求的應用英文技巧和目的，依其重要性，列出排序。最後，研究者提出該調查研究的限制，以及延續發展的方向。

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