A Study on the Language Needs of Student Teachers

T. Pushpanathan

Assistant Professor, Department of English, SCSVMV University, Kanchipuram, India.

Abstract

Due to the advent of globalisation, communication skills have become crucial for many professions and teaching is not an exception. Teachers communicate with students, parents, colleagues and administrators every day. Teachers need greater clarity of thought to present the material. They should be able to break down complex ideas into simpler parts and smaller steps to deliver to their students. They must be able to adapt their methods of communication to all students, regardless of ability or learning style. They are able to read their students and adapt to the needs of the individual. Effective communication involves transforming drilling interesting and has good presentation skills. Although training is often provided in isolation of a classroom without the presence of other adults, good teaching includes consultation with colleagues. Schools see themselves as professional learning communities encourage teachers to plan lessons together and learn from each other. They take a team approach to solving problems, especially for difficult students. This requires excellent communication. Teachers remain abreast of new trends in education by reading magazines, listening to new ideas from their administrators and school board consultants, and share and discuss these ideas with colleagues.

Hence, this research article aims to identify the language needs of the student teachers studying at Education colleges and hierarchically arrange the identified competencies in terms of their importance for their academic purposes and future profession as well.

Key words: language needs, student teachers, needs analysis, hierarchy, competencies.

1. Introduction

Education is a man-making process. This process is viable because of the committed teachers and trainers of the educational system. The success of any education system is largely dependent on the teachers' availability and the quality of teachers depends on the quality of teacher education. One of the objectives of teacher education is to enable the student teachers to develop their knowledge and understanding of the subject, teaching strategies, and to help them take advantage of this knowledge for effective teaching and learning in the classroom. And it supports successful teaching and learning to communicate between the teacher and students. Therefore, in order to achieve the ultimate goal of education, teachers should be good at communication first. Communication is an essential device for teaching and learning. The better the communication is, the better the teaching-learning process will be. The failure of communication is detrimental to the process of development of students. Classroom communication paves the way for communication to facilitate the teaching-learning process. All that happens in the classroom is created and sustained through the communication process.

The tasks for the teachers in the school premises are getting more challenging these days as a result of increased competition for the communication skills. A student teacher with first class distinction at graduation fails to perform even simple tasks in his workplace when there is information to be communicated. Since they are transmitting knowledge from one generation to the other, they should be excellent communicators of the target language

especially English. It is not only for the language teachers but for subject teachers too. The student teachers at Education colleges in our country are well trained in the micro-teaching & macro-teaching techniques, methods to effectively transmit the knowledge, usage of teaching learning materials, adopting the latest strategies in the classrooms, etc. Amidst all, there comes an issue of poor communication skills, not specific while teaching and learning, and explanations are not brief. In such a context, there is a felt need to identify the needs of English language in reading, listening, speaking, and writing skills for the student teachers. So, this study aims to identify the language needs of the student teachers from the selected Education Colleges in Tiruvannamalai District. This identification indeed helps the teacher educators to efficiently train the communicative competencies of the student teachers along with microteaching and others.

2. Literature Review

The literature review highlights the importance of Needs Analysis in designing a language curriculum and designing a training material for the employees of various domains. The studies on needs analysis conducted in various colleges and industries to identify the language needs are the source of inspiration and information for this research work which encourages the researcher to investigate the language needs of the prospective teachers in Tiruvannamalai District, Tamilnadu.

West describes needs analysis as "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" (1). For a better understanding about needs analysis, Beatty and Chan (1984) describe that it could be a useful tool for collecting information from the subjects who could be excellent informants about the content of the language course or field of study.

Needs Analysis is an investigation, in light of specification of the tasks a learner or group of learners will be requires to perform in the target language need to be learnt in order to bring about proficiency in these particular tasks. The results of needs analysis can be used to determine a syllabus and suitable teaching techniques (Brumfit and Roberts, 1987).

Enginarlar (1982) conducted a needs assessment study at Middle East Technical University in order to identify the academic needs and lacks of the freshman students studying at social science based departments. Their needs in writing was tried to be revealed. Freshmen students and instructors of different social science based departments participated in the study. Students were given comprehensive questionnaires, whereas the instructors were interviewed. Students' written productions and exam papers were examined as well. The types of activities required in writing and the difficulties students encountered related to writing skill were revealed. The effectiveness of the program at the Preparatory School was evaluated and an important degree of discrepancy between the students' needs when writing and the writing instruction provided in the preparatory school was identified. Recommendations for syllabus design of the writing component of the instruction at the Preparatory School were made.

Using a questionnaire survey, Lombardo (1988) investigated the needs and attitudes towards learning English of 200 students in the School of Economics of an Italian university. A parallel questionnaire was also given to 51 non-language members of the teaching staff. The survey found that students were motivated to learn English in order to improve their chances of employment. The activities most needed to succeed in their field were understanding oral reports and reading professional materials. It was also found that listening skills were the most important, followed by speaking, reading and writing. Both

students and teachers viewed technical terminology as the greatest source of problem for students in reading in English.

Rattanapinyowong et al. (1988) investigated the English language academic needs of healthcare students at Mahidol University, Bangkok. Questionnaires were administered to 351 students of nursing and related fields. In addition, interviews were conducted with teachers in a number of departments of the university. The data collected were analyzed in order to identify the English language needs of the students. The study concluded that fewer academic needs were expressed than expected. Both the students and teachers stressed the need for English courses designed for specific healthcare professions.

Jafre-Bin-Zainol-Abidin (1992) attempted to identify the English language needs of science students enrolled in an English course for business purposes at the University of Malaysia. The researcher administered a questionnaire to the students and to personnel managers and employees of a number of companies in Malaysia. Reading was found to be the most important skill from the point of view of students, while listening and speaking were more important from the point of view of employees. It was recommended that university courses should consider students' needs that reading skills should be given more emphasis in academic studies and that students should take part in identifying study texts.

Elkilic (1994) conducted a similar NA study, attempting to identify the English language needs of medical students at Selcuk University in Turkey. The participants were students, English language teachers and subject specialists; the method of data collection was via questionnaires. The findings indicated that students regarded reading as the most important skill and listening as the second most important for them. They stated that reading was important in order to be able to understand reports, magazines and scholarly journals, and to translate materials from English into Turkish.

According to the findings of needs analysis in other countries, there have been many studies conducted in many places at different conditions. The similarity of these studies is that they use needs analysis to investigate the exact needs of the target group in order to achieve the maximum goal. It can be concluded that various groups of studies require different language skills based on the purpose of each group or occupation. Needs analysis can be identified as the first step in any planning or design process and used as the way to gather the desired result which is an actual need. Finally, an appropriate solution will be targeted to each group. Thus, literature reveals that systematic needs analysis are necessary in order to study the skills which are required for a group of learners through different data collection instruments from different sources. The results of such studies lead to useful decisions regarding the improvement of basic curricular elements. In order to identify the required language skills for the prospective teachers (B.Ed. Students) of Tiruvannamalai District, the researcher has used a needs analysis questionnaire.

3. Methodology

The responses are collected from the student teachers of selected B.Ed. colleges of Tiruvannamalai District using random sampling method. The participants are B.Ed. students of opted English as an optional language paper. The research questionnaire is framed by taking the items used by Habtamu Desta (2008) in his study on 'English Language Needs Analysis of Fine Art Students at Mekelle College of Teacher Education'. Few more items are added into the questionnaire and it is standardised through a pilot study. The researcher has approached the officials of 25 educational institutions to collect the responses from their student teachers. Out of which 15 have permitted the researcher to meet their students and collect the responses. The options for the items are: very important,

important, moderately, not important, and totally unimportant. The widely used Likert 5-point scale is used to analyse the responses with the option 'very important' carrying 5 and 'totally unimportant' carries 1.

In order to identify the English language needs of the prospective teachers, the descriptive statistics has been used in this study. When using frequency analysis, SPSS Statistics can also calculate the mean, median and mode to help users analyse the results and draw conclusions. In this study, frequency helps to understand the number of occurrences of each response chosen by the student teachers selected from the Education colleges in Tiruvannamalai District.

4. Analysis of Results

The frequencies of the percentages of four language skills are identified by frequency distribution. The frequency provides the frequency of the requirements of these secondary skills and helps to organize sub sequentially skills in terms of the most essential and least essential for effective transfer of information in the classroom. They are also instructed to assess the importance of sub-skills to their academic studies as well as for their future profession.

Significant sub skills of reading, listening, speaking, and writing skills are identified after Statistical analysis. These sub skills are found essential for the respondents' academic studies as well as future profession. Frequency analysis has been applied in this study to find out the essential sub skills for the target audience. The numbers of sub skills emerged out of this study are found enormous, the sub skills which are with 60% and above percentage are considered as most essential. Hence, they are extracted as important sub skills for successful completion of their course and effective workplace functionality as well.

These essential competencies of four skills beginning with reading extended through listening, speaking, and writing skills are hierarchically arranged according to their importance in their academic studies and future profession as well.

- Rank: 1 – *Listening to course lectures*
- Rank: 2 – *Speaking at seminars*
- Rank: 3 - *Writing letters (74.5%)*
- Rank: 4 - *Writing course assignments (74.5)*
- Rank: 5 - *Listening to Class discussions (74%)*
- Rank: 6 - *Writing Plays (74%)*
- Rank: 7 - *Speaking at Meetings (74%)*
- Rank: 8 - *Reading newspapers (73%)*
- Rank: 9 - *Speaking with lecturers (73%)*
- Rank: 10 - *Listening News channels (72%)*
- Rank: 11 – *Writing notes and exam papers (72%)*
- Rank: 12 - *Speaking in Class discussions and writing e-mail messages (71%)*
- Rank: 13 – *Reading college/university prospectus*
- Rank: 14 - *Listening to seminars (67.5%)*

- Rank: 15 - *Reading Academic Texts (64.5%)*

- Rank: 16 - *Writing Reports (64)*

- Rank: 17 - *Reading Reference materials (63%)*

- Rank: 18 - *Reading Short stories (63.0)*

- Rank: 19 - *Listening to presentations (61%)*

- Rank: 20 - *Reading Comics (60)*

5. Findings and recommendations

The identified essential competencies for the student teachers are ranked in terms of their significance for their academic studies and future profession. This arrangement of essential competencies is found essential for the student teachers from the selected Education colleges of Tiruvannamalai District. These competencies can be used for purposes of framing the suitable curriculum for the student teachers in order to excel in their profession. It can be used to identify the skill gaps in communication skills for effective functioning in the workplace of the student teachers and necessary remedial measures in the form skilling can be decided upon. Special communication skills modules can be designed by taking the findings of the study especially for these student teachers in the form of interviews and test. Similar studies in other departments will give way related results and will enable curriculum corrective measures in the area of teacher education.

REFERENCES

1. Beatty, C.J. & Chan, M.J. (1984) Chinese scholars abroad: Changes in perceived academic needs. ESP Journal, Vol. 3. No. 1. pp53-59.
2. Brumfit, C.J. & Roberts, J.T. (1987) *An Introduction to language and language learning with comprehensive glossary of terms*. London: Batsfords Academic and Education.
3. Elkilic, G. (1994) 'An Analysis of the English Language Needs of Veterinary Medicine Students at Selcuk University' *Unpublished Master Dissertation,* Bilkent University, Turkey.
4. Enginarlar, H. (1982) The identification of the writing needs of freshman first term students in social sciences. *Unpublished master's thesis*, The Middle East Technical University, Ankara.
5. Jafre-Bin-Zainol-Abidin, M. (1992) *The English Language Needs of Students at the Science University of Malaysia* England: Keele University.
6. Lombardo, L. (1988) *Language learners needs, interests and motivation: A survey of EFL students in an Italian economics faculty*. ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED304006.
7. Rattanapinyowong, W. et al. (1988) A Study of the academic English needs of medical students. *Pasaa: A Journal of Language Teaching and Learning in Thailand*, Chulalongkorn University, Thailand. Vol. 18, No. 1, pp32-39.
8. West, R. (1994) Needs analysis in language teaching. *Language Teaching,* Vol. 27, No. 1, pp1–19