



DEVELOPING AN ENGLISH LANGUAGE CURRICULUM FOR CHINESE NURSING STUDENTS IN SRI LANKA: BALANCING ACADEMIC AND EVERYDAY LANGUAGE NEEDS

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As global academic mobility increases, higher education institutions must design English language courses that cater to the specific and practical needs of international students. This study focuses on developing a tailor-made English curriculum for a group of Chinese students enrolled in the Masters in Nursing programme at the Open University of Sri Lanka (OUSL). Although these students were academically qualified, they struggled to use English effectively in their academic, professional, and everyday interactions. English, for them, had been learned as a classroom subject, not as a functional communication tool. The challenge, therefore, was to create a curriculum that was both practical and culturally responsive. A detailed needs analysis was conducted with input from both the Department of Nursing and the students. The analysis highlighted key areas where language support was urgently required: academic writing, speaking, listening comprehension, and everyday communication. Based on these findings, the Department of English Language Teaching (DELT) designed a short course titled *English for Healthcare Professionals*. The course consisted of 24 sessions delivered in a blended format, with online modules offered prior to the students' arrival in Sri Lanka and face-to-face classes conducted afterward. Lessons were built around real-life scenarios such as speaking to doctors, using public transport, and participating in class discussions. Materials were also developed to include healthcare vocabulary, role-play exercises, and simple grammar activities, supported by digital tools. The curriculum development process demonstrated that effective English teaching for international students requires more than academic content—it must also support students' day-to-day lives in a new environment. The course design was informed by stakeholder input and built on principles of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and learner-centred pedagogy. This study emphasizes the importance of a needs-based, culturally aware approach to English curriculum development. It offers valuable insights for institutions aiming to support non-native English speakers in professional academic settings while ensuring they are equipped to navigate everyday life with confidence.

Keywords: English for Specific Purposes (ESP), curriculum development, needs analysis, international students, English for nursing

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Introduction

This study focuses on developing an English Language course for a group of Chinese students who came to follow the Master's Nursing Programme at the Open University of Sri Lanka. (OUSL). While they were prepared academically, they faced difficulties using English in both their studies and daily life. According to Bosher (2010), very limited focus has been placed on the actual language requirements of the learners. For many of these learners, English is introduced in schools as a subject to study rather than a language to use. However, they were now expected to apply it in reading medical literature, writing academic content, interacting with patients, and managing everyday tasks. Furthermore, Quimosing-Ocay (2022) explores the role of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in relevant contexts. It is important to clarify that foreign language learning typically involves acquiring a language that is not spoken in the surrounding environment and is mainly taught in formal classroom settings. Compared to a second language (L2), exposure is significantly limited, and the language is sometimes even perceived as unfamiliar or distant.

The Department of English Language Teaching (DELT) was asked to create a short course that would help these students adjust to their new learning environment. But the task was more than just creating lessons. Bosher (2010) noted that collaboration among nursing students in EFL contexts has been relatively limited. As such, the target course needed to be adaptable, hands-on, and mindful of the students' cultural context. It was essential for the programme to support students in using English not only in academic and clinical settings but also in everyday situations.

Three main objectives of the research:

1. **To identify** the key academic and everyday English needs of Chinese postgraduate nursing students through a structured needs analysis.
2. **To develop** a curriculum framework that directly responds to those identified needs and incorporates input from both students and nursing lecturers.
3. **To examine** the effectiveness of a blended teaching model (pre-arrival online sessions + post-arrival face-to-face sessions) in improving students' communicative competence.



The following questions guided the research:

- What are the students' needs and needs of the subject lecturer from a tailor-made English course?
- What aspects should be incorporated in the curriculum to cater to their needs?
- What delivery mode EFL students feel confident and active when learning English in a new environment?

METHODOLOGY

This was a qualitative study supported by descriptive quantitative data. A detailed needs assessment was conducted before planning the course. Input was collected from both from lecturers of the Department of Nursing through a questionnaire and focus group discussion.

At the same time, a survey was carried out with the target student group (14 students) through a questionnaire. This needs analysis incorporates elements of target situation analysis, means analysis, and learning situation analysis, as outlined by Dudley-Evans and St John (1998) and West (1994). Boshier and Smalkoski (2002) designed a healthcare communication course specifically for ESL learners, incorporating role-play activities that reflected real-life clinical situations. These simulations were used to build students' confidence and improve their ability to communicate successfully in professional healthcare environments.

The feedback from both sources contributed to design a short course called **English for Healthcare Professionals: A Short Course for International Students**. It included 24 sessions:

- 8 online sessions before the students arrived in Sri Lanka
- 16 face-to-face sessions after they arrived

The online lessons were used to introduce basic vocabulary, healthcare words, and classroom English. Once they arrived at OUSL, in-person classes were used to increase their speaking and listening practice. Two tutors led each face-to-face session to make sure everyone received attention and support.

The course taught all four skills: reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Grammar and healthcare vocabulary were included in everyday and professional situations. Lessons included how to explain symptoms, talk to doctors, greet university staff, engage in small talk, and converse in everyday situations.



Two assessments were given: a written test (covering vocabulary, grammar, and comprehension) and an oral test (testing their ability to speak and listen in context).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Nursing Department listed five important areas where students needed help:

- Grammar for academic writing
- Basic communication for everyday use
- Developing speaking skills
- Listening to English in class and clinical situations
- Reading academic texts using skills like skimming and scanning

Table 1. Identified Needs and Curriculum Responses

Identified Needs	Curriculum Response
Grammar for academic writing	Structured lessons on sentence building, writing tasks
Basic everyday communication	Dialogues, role-plays, and interactive games
Speaking skills	Guided discussions, peer conversations
Listening in class/clinical contexts	Audio exercises, real-life simulations
Reading academic texts	Skimming, scanning, and comprehension activities

Students, assessed at Band 3 (UTEL 2021), reported difficulties with comprehending spoken English, constructing grammatically accurate sentences, and performing basic communicative tasks such as requesting directions or interacting with staff. This is supported by Bosher and Smalkoski (2002), who designed a healthcare communication course specifically for ESL learners, incorporating role-play activities that reflected real-life clinical situations. These simulations were used to



build students' confidence and improve their ability to communicate successfully in professional healthcare environments.

The English for Healthcare Professionals curriculum was carefully developed based on the findings from a detailed needs analysis. Once the language and practical needs of the Chinese nursing students were clearly understood, thoughtful decisions were made about the structure, content, and method of delivery for the course materials. Lessons were designed to include engaging elements such as simple healthcare role-plays, interactive games, and digital learning materials that students could use on their own time.

Each lesson was created with two main goals in mind. One goal was to help students manage their academic tasks, such as daily journals and reading basic articles. The other goal was to support their daily communication in Sri Lanka, including asking for directions and talking about symptoms. Boshier (2010) emphasises that culture significantly influences the success of teaching nursing students from diverse ethnic backgrounds. By combining both academic and everyday communication needs, the course aimed to ease the stress often associated with learning English, making the process more accessible and engaging for learners.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This course showed the importance of understanding the background, academic and language requirements of international students when designing language courses.

Three key observations from the process:

1. The role and effectiveness of a well-designed needs analysis in catering to the stake holder requirements
2. The effectiveness of face –to- face teaching for elementary level EFL students.
3. Importance of focusing on both academic and general communication skills when developing English courses for EFL learners

The course is planned to improve further, with follow-up on students' English use in clinical settings. The department also aims to build a ladder system for progressive skill development. Future research could explore longitudinal outcomes by tracking students' English use in clinical practice, and investigating how progressive course levels (ladder systems) can further strengthen professional communication. English



is not just a subject but a life skill, and this course marks the first step toward that journey.

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