

Third-Level Nursing Students Engaged in an ESP Didactic Unit

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Abstract

In order to assess the teaching of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) in third - level nursing students, a pedagogical experience was carried out at the Pontifical Catholic University of Ecuador in Esmeraldas, during the first semester of 2016, for which a group of 30 students was observed during a lesson - planned didactic unit entitled "The body". The methods used were analysis and syntheses. The students used their text books to practice with some communicative exercises which were already planned, devoted to the ESP teaching-learning process. The results revealed that the students were a lot more motivated to participate in classes, their language level during the lessons improved as they were engaged in active work during the whole unit, integrating the four skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing in the teaching-learning process of ESP. At the end the students were able to write paragraphs about the different diseases, also they could summarize the most relevant aspects of the different illnesses orally, and they could interpret texts and videos related to different diseases.

Key words: English for Specific Purposes; Nursing students; pedagogical experience

Introduction

At present, the political, social and economic transformations are fast, that is why all professionals should acquire all the necessary knowledge, especially in the English Language. For that reason, the social task that the Ecuadorian Society has raised is to form a nursing student who could master this language, to interact in this society and in others.

The subject General English is taught to nursing students at PUCESE, making emphasis on the communicative functions of the language, also on vocabulary about the ordinary life, so it is taught as a foreign language. This situation has permitted students to learn English about daily situations, but not for the development of their profession, for this reason, when they finish the six semesters in which they receive General English, they are not prepared to use English for specific purposes in their career, that is in their professional practice.

For the development of this analysis it is necessary to do an overall view of the emergence and teaching of ESP.

The origin of ESP comes from the XVI century when some protestant merchants went to England and they had the necessity to use a language related to commerce which permitted them to survive in that world of business.

In 1969 was the time when ESP emerged with the publishing of the Information entitled “Languages for Special Purposes”. Another significant moment in the development of the teaching of English for Specific Purposes was the concept of communicative competence elaborated by Hymes, D (1972) which has also the term cultural competence, as an important element for the mastering of a foreign language.

Conditions that favored the development of ESP

According to Hutchinson & Waters (1987) there existed three reasons for the beginning and development of ESP: socio-economic, which was at the end of the Second world War, when technology and commerce dominated the world and the USA was the most powerful country, so there were people who knew English and it became the International Language, as it was very useful in commerce, business and medicine.

The second reason was in the linguistic order, and it was what Hutchinson & Waters called “a linguistic revolution”, which consists of how to use the language in real communication. One of the discoveries was the establishment of the difference between oral and written language.

The third reason was the one that permits students to have another role in the classroom, which is to be the center of the class, in the teaching-learning process, which made possible the starting of ESP.

Widdowson (1984) states that ESP means professional-oriented teaching or learning of English. Robinson (1984) highlights that it is basically a means for reaching the indispensable proficiency, but not an end in itself. Hutchinson and Waters highlight that it is a “definable need” to use English which differentiates ESP from GPE (General Purpose English), and an ESP course is regarded as by its content (e.g. Medicine). All these authors coincide that students’ need for professional practice is very important.

Robinson (1984) states that the analysis of necessities is the point of departure to give any concept.

Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998) stated that ESP has some characteristics as:

It is designed to satisfy students’ necessities

It is related to the content of particular disciplines

It is based on a language that is adjusted to syntax, lexis, discourse and semantics to the discipline of analysis

English for Nursing Purposes (ENP)

ENP is a somewhat new sphere inside the field of English for specific purposes. It emphasizes on the detailed ways in which nurses, not the same as doctors and other professionals, practice English both in the scientific setting as in nursing training. Whereas in current years several texts have been available in English for nursing, most of them center on the medical site and are planned for globally educated nurses who are looking for moving in the workforce in countries, like Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom, and the United States. More important, but likewise less known, are the great amounts of English as a second language (ESL) emigrants and, to a smaller range, global schoolboys in Inner Circle countries who identify nursing as their major in two- and four-year colleges and universities. Many of these students do not make it through the prerequisite courses, and those who do often encounter difficulty succeeding once they are in nursing programs.

Various needs analyses have been conducted to determine the objective, subjective, and learning needs of immigrant and international students in undergraduate-degree nursing programs (Bosher and Smalkoski, 2008). (ENP) is a subject of (ESP) education that most often focuses on teaching aspects of medical English, particularly terminology. These include critical thinking about authentic, genuine case studies, problem-based learning, evidence-based practice and more, based on many years of experience.

According to Suárez (2006), it is very important to teach nursing students in communication situations, in which they have to range their daily activities, also with such communicative situations they could have the need to claim and convey information.

It can be inferred that for teaching nursing students the teacher has to create an atmosphere in which they can interact with activities connected to their specialty in their training studies.

Ramirez et al. (2016) stated that nurses need to interact communicatively and they require empathy in the nurses-patients relationship, so teachers should select the contents according to the activities nurses perform in their daily life. This coincides with Suárez (2006). Both authors requested for creating communicative situations related to the nursing professional activity, in order to develop a meaningful teaching learning process

Method

Population and sample

The population was formed by 30 students from the 3rd nursing level from the Nursing School at PUCESE in the first semester of 2016. The sample was the total of the population.

Methods

Theoretical and empirical methods were used which permitted to analyze the object of study in a scientific way and contribute to change the reality.

Analysis and syntheses: to examine the problem and to catch the notion that fit in it.

Historic-logic: to know the interest students from the Nursing School at PUCESE had in relation to learning ESP and to propose the exercises to be developed in classes.

Systemic- structural: to get the content structured.

Empirical methods

Documentary analysis: Normative documents for the teaching of the English language in Higher Education in Ecuador were consulted, also the syllabus used in the English teaching-learning process in the Nursing career at PUCESE.

A diagnosis was applied to these students, to know their linguistic necessities to use the English Language in medical contexts

The method of observation was also used to know the principal difficulties students had in the English Language, for that reason, a record card was applied to students while they were doing the exercises. The principal elements which were measured were: use of medical vocabulary, the development of communicative abilities in the career of nursing and making questions for the nursing interview.

Results

The diagnosis revealed nursing students from the 3rd level had insufficiencies in using the medical vocabulary, in developing the communicative abilities for the career and in formulating questions.

With the use of the text book entitled “World English 3”, the students studied unit 4 “The body”, in which some terms about Medical English were introduced, so they practiced the language by means of some communicative exercises, orally and written, for example:

The teacher asked them to discuss in groups where the most important human body organs were and the functions they had.

Instructions: Discuss in groups about the most important systems of the human body. Refer to the most important functions. With the practice of the exercise previously mentioned students were able to use some medical terms related to the topic and to establish a relationship of the content with the main parts of the body.

Extension exercise: After this, they discussed in groups the most common diseases children and adults suffer from in Esmeraldas, which were related to the body parts and body systems.

In this exercise they were able to write about different common diseases in Esmeraldas, with their concepts, clinical picture, risk factors and the pharmacological and the non-pharmacological treatments. In that opportunity they filled a chart with this information.

Interview a patient who is hypertensive/diabetic/ had an ulcer/had a respiratory disease Ask questions for:

General information: name, age, marital status, job/profession.

Questions about the medical problem: onset of the problem, symptoms, duration, frequency.

Questions about habits: cigarette smoking, alcohol consumption, medications, diet.

Questions for past and family history: if the patient had suffered from any other disease, if any family member suffered from the disease or anything related to it.

With these exercises students practiced questioning using medical vocabulary related to the diseases mentioned before, they worked cooperatively and collaboratively.

The students expressed their opinions about the exercises developed. They realized that with them they could obtain medical vocabulary which helped them communicate with tourists who are assisted in the emergency room, by means of a good interview and the instructions for diagnosis. They agreed to say that to learn Medical English is necessary for the diagnostic discussion. They also revealed that learning and practicing had let them report what they read on updated articles in English related to their specialty.

Discussion

English has become the internationally accepted language of the majority of fields. Communication in the English Language for nursing students is really of a great importance, especially in the city of Esmeraldas, by the fact that this place is an area full of tourists who are English speaking persons. When the students finish their studies and start working in the different areas where they have to work, they face a reality in which the need to know the English Language is crucial, because they have to take care of patients and they do not have the necessary knowledge of medical terms. This limits their interview to those patients, and the development of other actions in the hospital. In addition, they face difficulties to communicate in international medical congresses or in any other events where the official language is English. Besides, it is very difficult for them to read updated bibliography of their specialty, which is in mainly published in English.

Robinson (1984), Widdowson (1984), Hutchinson & Waters (1987) Dudley-Evans & St. John (1998), Suárez (2006) and Ramírez (2016) agreed on the importance of teaching English for Specific Purposes, according to the students' needs, to acquire specific vocabulary and professional abilities to improve students' proficiency in the English Language, in such a way that they could communicate efficiently in their daily activities at work. After applying the exercises previously explained, the students were highly motivated to learn Medical English and they realized the importance of it for their future career.

Conclusions

The teaching of English for Specific Purposes to nursing students has a great importance in this city, which is visited by many tourists from English-speaking countries, who are usually assisted in the hospital or clinics of

the province. So, if nursing students get more preparation in the English Language, health attention to English speaking people will be improved.

Nurses could expand their scientific culture, and they could be able to present their investigations at health international congresses.

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