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Healthcare Workers and English Language Skills Needs in Yemen.

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to investigate the English language needs and performance of healthcare workers at the local hospitals in Yemen. Participants were chosen from the three main hospitals located in Ibb and Taiz Cities, Yemen. The national participants were 135 and the expats were 12 participants. Through questionnaire surveys, detailed results were obtained concerning the main communication skills: Speaking, listening, reading, and writing in their work place. Data from the participants' attitudes revealed that most of hospital staff had positive attitudes towards the value of English and English learning needs. The findings showed the participants' positive goals towards English language learning as a means to balance the medical knowledge with the general English skills needed. Most of the participants were not satisfied with their performance in English in general. Therefore, there is an urgent need to design the suitable training courses that meet the needs of healthcare workers; medical students and nurses' collage in Yemen.

Keywords: Needs assessment, workplace, Medical staff, English language

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INTRODUCTION

Communication is the process of exchanging information and ideas. There are many means of communication. To be an effective and valuable member of your workplace it is important that you become skilled in all of the different methods of communication that are appropriate. Several studies of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) have provided evidence of the importance of teaching English for specific purposes (Li So-mui et al 2000; Edwards 2000). For example, it has been observed that the type of language used by each worker is influenced by the worker's working instrument (Zak and Dudley-Evans 1986, Pogner 2003), by his aims and professional constraints, as well as by his specialization and the type of duties assigned to him, and by the texts the worker produces and deals with (Macintosh 1990, Edwards 2000). These educational studies have been developing in tandem with a recognition that learning English for specific purposes play important roles in workers' and administrators' success in their fields of work and business environments (Al-khatib 2005).

Traditionally, English for medical purposes (EMP) has been categorized under the umbrella term of ESP, an important and dynamic area of specialization within the field of English language teaching and learning. Since the purpose of ESP is to help learners to be equipped with the specific domains of language knowledge and skills, and to apply these skills appropriately in the specific discipline, profession, or workplace, the special language needs of the specified context thus play a critical role as a prerequisite in securing language successful. A needs analysis not only enables learners to raise their awareness of specific language requirements concerning their work posts, but also motivates the learners and maximizes the likelihood of promoting active learning. An important component of needs assessment is to check the present language performance so that it helps to measure the gap between present abilities and performance and target needs. Performance assessment refers to assessing how well employees use language knowledge and skills in the specific workplace such as medical institution. In Spain, Garcia-Mayo (1995) carried out a needs analysis study for Health Science. The study recommends that there is a need for future pharmacists and laboratory technicians, medical doctors to improve their English listening and speaking skills because of the growing tendency to work in collaboration with expats from all over the world working worldwide in non-governmental organizations.

METHODOLOGY

A total of 135 local healthcare workers and 12 expats were participants in this study. A questionnaire was used as the instruments for this study. The location of the study was at three hospitals in Ibb and Taiz cities, Yemen. The names of the hospitals are Althwra, Doctors without border hospital and Alhawban. The duration of this study was conducted from April 2016 until August 2017. The first question asks about the importance of English language in their jobs. Then the following four questions ask about the necessity of the four language skills in their jobs. Questions from six to twenty nine ask for the needs of the different English language skills to perform the different needed tasks using English language. The last question, question number 30 asks the participants to state which of the English language skills cause the most problem among the employees in hospital. The questionnaire is based on a five point likert scale.

RESULTS

The following is a detailed results collected from the questionnaire. The results are classified according to the English language skills which are speaking, listening, reading and writing and also according to the respondents.

The Medical Doctors

The first part talks about the importance of English language skills among the doctors' at the workplace- hospital.

Table (1): Writing, listening reading and speaking skills among doctors' responses

Writing skills						
Item	V .important	Important	Neutral	Less important	Not important	
1	How necessary is Writing in English for your job?	62	38	0	0	0
2	Need of Writing in English to write Circulars.	0	9	91	0	0
3	Need of Writing in English to write specific texts e.g. Commandant papers etc...	0	82	18	0	0
4	Need of Writing in English to do and write translation.	0	21	32	37	10
5	Need of writing in English to fill in the medical forms for patients.	0	43	40	17	0
Listening skills						
1	How necessary is Listening in English for your job?	63	37	0	0	0
2	Need of Listening skill in order to follow presentation or talks in English.	90	10	0	0	0
3	Need of Listening skill in order to follow instructions in English.	83	27	0	0	0
Reading skills						
1	How necessary is Reading in English for your job?	80	20	0	0	0
2	Need of Reading in English to read letters/ memos/ emails.	0	0	54	32	14
3	Need of Reading in English to read Circulars.	0	0	30	70	0
4	Need of Reading in English to read technical documents/manuals.	81	12	7	0	0
Speaking skills						
1	How necessary is Speaking in English for your job?	70	30	0	0	0
2	Need of Speaking skills to present new ideas and alternative strategies in English.	73	27	0	0	0
3	Need of Speaking in English to work in a team.	30	12	44	14	0
4	Need of Speaking in English to discuss work related matters formally.	100	0	0	0	0

5	Need of Speaking in English to converse informally and socially.	0	10	77	10	3
6	Need of Speaking in English to give oral presentations.	87	13	0	0	0
7	Need of Speaking in English to instruct, explain and demonstrate.	10	78	12	0	0
8	Need of Speaking in English to negotiate with team members.	0	0	0	17	83

The medical doctors indicate that the writing skills are very important and important (62% & 38%) respectively. For writing circulars, in their work, the doctors mention that it is in between, neutral (91%). Writing specific texts such as reports is important (82%) while writing to do and write translations is not important. In addition, need of writing to fill in the medical forms is important (43%).

For listening skills, most of the medical doctors indicate that are very important and important (63% & 37%) respectively. In order to follow presentations especially in training sessions and exchanging ideas orally is very important (90%). The need to follow oral instructions in English is also very important and important (83% & 27%) respectively. The medical doctors mention that reading is also a very important skill (80%), while reading letters, memos and emails is not important as they enjoy reading them using their mother language. Moreover, the need of reading circulars is also not important because they are rarely used. However, reading technical documents and manuals is very important in their views (81%).

Most of the medical doctors indicate that speaking is very important in their jobs to view their new ideas and alternative strategies (70% & 73%, very important respectively). Speaking via telephone is not considered important because it is only used when there is an urgent case and needs the expat to come for medical decisions such as to be admitted or to be operated or discharged. Need of speaking to discuss work related matters got the total agreement of all medical doctors and surgeons (100% very important) while using speaking to work in a team is neutral (44%) and this is because the medical doctors and surgeons when they speak to the team they mostly use the mother tongue so that using English is not taking that importance. The need of speaking to give oral presentations is very important (87%) this is because doctors are asked to make training sessions on important topics that the medical team needs to be improved, however, to converse informally and socially is neutral (77%) this is because the doctors have the idea that informal conversation can be understood with broken English or less. To explain and demonstrate in English is important (78%).

The Nurses' Responses

The following part gives results taken from the nurses of IPD, ER, and OT who work in the three hospitals of Althwra, Doctors without border hospital and Alhawban Hospital located in Ibb and Taiz cities, Yemen.

Table (2): Writing, listening reading and speaking skills among the expats responses

Writing skills						
	Item	V.important	Important	Neutral	Less important	Not important
1	How necessary is Writing in English for your job?	0	15	12	73	0

2	Need of Writing in English to write Circulars.	0	0	10	74	16
3	Need of Writing in English to write specific texts e.g. Commandant papers.	0	0	7	0	93
4	Need of Writing in English to do and write translation.	0	0	71	20	9
Listening skills						
1	How necessary is Listening in English for your job?	31	51	0	18	0
2	Need of Listening skill in order to follow presentation or talks in English.	87	8	5	0	0
3	Need of Listening skill in order to follow instructions in English.	91	9	0	0	0
Reading skills						
1	How necessary is reading in English for your job?	34	40	8	18	0
2	Need of reading in English to read letters/ memos/ emails.	0	0	0	26	74
3	Need of reading in English to read Circulars.	0	0	0	17	83
4	Need of reading in English to read technical documents/manuals.	92	8	0	0	0
Speaking skills						
1	How necessary is Speaking in English for your job?	71	0	29	0	0
2	Need of Speaking skills to present new ideas and alternative strategies in English.	37	46	11	6	0
3	Need of Speaking in English to work in a team.	0	20	70	10	0
4	Need of Speaking in English to discuss work related matters formally.	0	34	66	0	0
5	Need of Speaking in English to converse informally and socially.	0	31	41	12	16
6	Need of Speaking in English to give oral presentations.	0	0	6	84	10
7	Need of Speaking in English to instruct, explain and demonstrate.	0	0	79	11	10
8	Need of Speaking in English to negotiate with team members.	0	0	7	93	0

The first skill is writing skills and the table (2) presents the results in percentages about the nurse's needs of using English in their work in the hospital and using English as a medium between them and the expats from different countries.

According to the table (2) above, most of the nurses (73%) indicate that writing in English for their jobs are less important and also the same for writing circulars (74%). In addition, to write specific texts is not important (93%) and to do and write translations is neutral (71%).

According to the above table (2), most of the nurses consider listening is important in their jobs (51%) as well as it is very important to follow presentations or talks in English (87%). Moreover, to follow instructions in English is very important (91%).

Reading skills, according to the nurses responses are very necessary and necessary (34% & 40%) respectively. However, reading letters, memos and emails is not important (74%). The need of reading to read technical documents is very important (92%) while reading circulars is not important (83%).

According to the table (2) above, nurses of the different departments consider speaking skills very important (71%) and speaking to present new ideas and alternative strategies is important (46%). However, the need of speaking to work in a team is neutral (70%). At the same time, the need of speaking to discuss work related matters formally is also neutral (66%). To converse informally and socially is also neutral which indicates that the nurses prefer to use Arabic in this regard. To give oral presentations is less important as it is not responsibility to make training but receive training mostly. To instruct, explain and demonstrate is neutral and this is because the mostly receive instructions and explanations from medical doctors and not the opposite. Finally, need of speaking to negotiate with team members are less important according to the nurses responses.

Expats

This part is allocated to the expats who are speakers of other languages and came from different countries from around the world. They come to work as surgeons, ER, OT, and IPD supervisors as well as nurses and office administration. All of them use the English language as a means to communicate with the national staffs who speaks Arabic language as the main language. The English is the medium of communication so that the study attempts to investigate the need of expats in using English with national employees. The questionnaire is distributed between the twelve expats of different positions and they agreed to fill in the questionnaire. The following is the responses in percentages of the expats regarding their needs of using the different language skills.

Table (3): Writing, listening reading and speaking skills among the expats responses

Writing skills						
	Item	V.important	Important	Neutral	Less important	Not important
1	How necessary is Writing in English for your job?	20	71	9	0	0
2	Need of Writing in English to write Circulars.	0	70	23	7	0
3	Need of Writing in English to write specific texts e.g. Commandant papers etc...	64	28	8	0	0
4	Need of Writing in English to do and write translation.	0	76	20	4	0
5	Need of writing in English to fill in the medical forms for patients.	0	82	18	0	0
Listening Skills						
1	How necessary is Listening in English for your job?	10	90	0	0	0
2	Need of Listening skill in order to follow presentation or talks in English.	72	21	7	0	0

3	Need of Listening skill in order to follow instructions in English.	0	37	30	33	0
Reading skills						
1	How necessary is Reading in English for your job?	0	71	0	29	0
2	Need of Reading in English to read letters/ memos/ emails.	10	85	5	0	0
3	Need of Reading in English to read Circulars.	0	71	20	3	6
4	Need of Reading in English to read technical documents/manuals.	77	23	0	0	0
Speaking skills						
1	How necessary is Speaking in English for your job?	100	0	0	0	0
2	Need of Speaking skills to present new ideas and alternative strategies in English.	76	23	1	0	0
3	Need of Speaking in English to work in a team.	96	4	0	0	0
4	Need of Speaking in English to discuss work related matters formally.	100	0	0	0	0
5	Need of Speaking in English to converse informally and socially.	0	30	70	0	0
6	Need of Speaking in English to give oral presentations.	63	30	7	0	0
7	Need of Speaking in English to instruct, explain and demonstrate.	82	11	7	0	0
8	Need of Speaking in English to negotiate with team members.	93	2	5	0	0

All the participants agree that writing in English for the purposes of the job is important (71%) and writing circulars is also important (70%). Moreover, writing in English to write specific texts and different papers is very important (64%) and writing to do and write translations is also important (76%). The following table (10) presents the responses of the expats in percentages regarding the needs of using English listening skills in their workplace. Listening in English is necessary (90%) and very important to follow presentations or talks (72%) and to follow instructions is between important and less important (37% & 33%) respectively. The expats consider reading in English for their workplace is important (71%) and to read letters and emails is also important (85%). Moreover, to read circulars and technical documents and manuals is important and very important respectively (71% & 77%).

DISCUSSION

Inadequate communication in healthcare context may have harmful consequences, such as communication medical errors and misunderstandings of possible health threat. General English skills represent the basis for communication and report writing. The participant doctors indicated that what they lack was the usage of general English words which are of a help to interact in the different language skills in an acceptable way. The medical terms and expressions were known to them and they found no difficulty in this

respect. These may be due to the lacking of extensive English language skills courses in their medical schools. Similar findings reported among nurses.

In this study, nurses from all departments showed difficulties in using general English. Despite some nurses understood the instructions given, specifically the speaking skills regarding any medical context, however they found difficulties in responding and expressing their thoughts and views. Due to the nature of the nurses work conversations was the main concern among them. This raises an important issue about the English language skills courses during their study. Nurses should have excellent skills to communicate with local and foreigner doctors for the best outcome for all the patients.

Results of this study indicated that most of the respondents needed English at work. English is important in many tasks at workplace such as documents preparation; reports writings, during meetings, communication during training sessions, and patients' progress are the most widely needs of the respondents. This study showed that nurses needed oral language skills more than written skills, while office workers need to use more written English skills than oral language skills. The nurses indicate that there is a need for them to have good skills in order to deal with misunderstanding problems between the team members so that there is a need to resolve problems especially in the presence of the expats so that they need to convey the exact expressions which require good speaking skills.

All the respondents agree that speaking in English is very necessary and this is because they find it important to speak in English to the local staff and also to the other expats who speak different languages and the best medium is English language. To present new ideas and to work in a team are very important. All the respondents indicated that it is very important to use speaking skills to discuss work related matters.

The need of speaking skills in English to give oral presentations and to instruct and explain, to negotiate with the team of the expats and the national team are all very important. Most of the expats specially the supervisors come with the idea of giving training sessions about different medical, hygienist, and administrative matters so that the use of speaking skills is of a vital need to use. Most of the times the national team has suggestions and complains about such matters so that to negotiate using speaking skills in English are very important.

CONCLUSION

Most of the participants were not satisfied with their performance in English in general. Therefore, there is an urgent need to design the suitable training courses that meet the needs of healthcare workers; medical students and nurses' collage in Yemen.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Interactive oral communication, listening skills, speaking skills, and cross-cultural skills should be given more emphasis in medical programs in Yemeni universities. Design special English courses for doctors and nurses that suite the culture, the needs and the customs of our community and environment.

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