

English for Empowering Paramedics

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ABSTRACT

English, in the era of globalization and the Internet, is acknowledged globally as a universal language. It is a language interlinked with communication skills. Mastery of this language has a far-reaching impact as it is the common language in the field of trade, commerce, education, research, politics, law, arts, and so on. The current paper explores the need for a course in English specific to the paramedics. Paramedics are healthcare providers who are skilled and authorized to attend to a person during an emergency and stabilize them even before the affected persons are taken to the hospital. They work as a team with doctors, technicians, pharmacists, nurses, and therapists, and many others with whom they interact. Language plays a major role. Therefore, one has to be aware of the language they need to use.

Keywords: English for paramedics; Communication skills in English.

Introduction

English is essential in the school and college curriculum in India; it also plays an integral role in finding job placements in reputed organizations. English has become a language of the Indians since the British colonization and is labeled as a second language. To learn a second language one needs motivation and a good attitude. Above all, since its declaration as the official language, English helps people in their career growth. Today, in the age of globalization and the Internet, English is used in all fields, be it trade, business, engineering, medicine, law, arts, science, politics, information technology, and so on. According to a news article in *India Today*, 2013, which focused on the increase in the number of engineering colleges and students graduating every year, the question of employability of graduates

pursuing graduation in engineering was raised. This emphasizes the need for language skills in the job market. Puneet Kumar Pandey, Senior Director, Talent Management Group, HCL Technologies, stated, “Engineers have to interact with customers. I have come across candidates who cannot draft a straight mail in English that needs to be sent to their customers.” “Written, verbal communication and etiquette have now become a major part of the selection criteria,” he said. Today, it is the same with medical colleges. Although the government scrutinizes the number of students entering the medical field, the intake is 200 per year in the private medical colleges and the challenge is even higher, especially when students from Tamil or other regional language medium schools face crucial challenges in meeting the demands. Language plays a major role, impeding their

entry into a professional course like medicine. English, when seen from one perspective, has become the language of the elites and remains a fruit that cannot be eaten by the poor.

English language skills, intertwined with communication skills, have become important in the field of healthcare, enabling healthcare professionals to communicate with people from across the world. Any healthcare professional requires a lot of technical skills pertaining to their field, but the ability to communicate effectively with their team members, to draw information from the patients, to respond to their queries, feelings, and concerns, to diagnose, and to build a good rapport with them, they need good communication skills.

English for Specific Purposes (ESP)

English for specific purposes is related to the teaching and learning of English as a second language or a foreign language, where the specific target of the teachers or the facilitators is to facilitate the student's need in a specific academic, professional, or occupational domain. Hutchinson and Waters attempted to define ESP as a variety of the many possible kinds of language teaching. They say that ESP must not be looked at as a matter of producing specialized varieties of English, and not as a matter of science words and grammar for scientists, but rather a need-based study with specificity and for apparent reasons. This was supported by Dudley-Evans with a note that ESP learning is the "attitude of mind".

Basturkmen, in her book *Developing Courses in English for Specific Purposes*, states that a learner is seen as a learner involved either

in academic, professional, or occupational needs and uses English as a channel to carry out those needs. In an ESP context, the learners would want to attain the 'real world' objectives, objectives requiring specific linguistic competencies. This idea of Basturkmen is strongly supported by Mohammad Kaosar Ahmed in his paper *The ESP Teacher: Issues, Tasks, and Challenges*.

English for Medical Purposes

This term refers to the teaching of English to healthcare providers, from doctors, nurses, physiotherapists, pharmacists, technologists, nutritionists, and emergency service providers, to technicians working as a team to save patients and the caregivers. Equipping them with skills related to their field along with communication skills, interpersonal skills, and language skills would best cater to the protocols of any health sector. The ESP teacher's knowledge and skill in imparting discipline-specific English skills is a very controversial issue. Learners of the respective field would possess a far more in-depth knowledge of their specialization than the teacher. For Strevens (1998:42), the ESP teacher is like the "educated layman", i.e. someone who is familiar with the language of the subject, whereas Robinson (1981) is convinced that what is required from the ESP teacher is a grasp of sub-O level concepts in a given area. These types of controversies can be partly removed by participation in conferences and various kinds of training programs. Lafford (2012) states that the teachers of ESP – in contrast to the non-English LSP practitioners – are much better served by annual conferences conducted by various professional organizations.

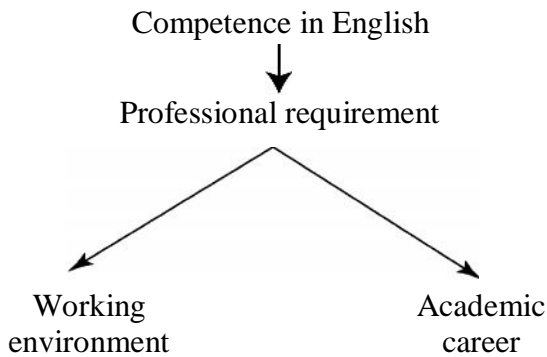


Figure 1

Figure 1 shows that irrespective of the needs, one has to strengthen one’s language competence to fulfill the professional requirements. This completely depends on the working atmosphere and academic profession. It is higher in the field of medicine and its related fields where communication is the basis for everything.

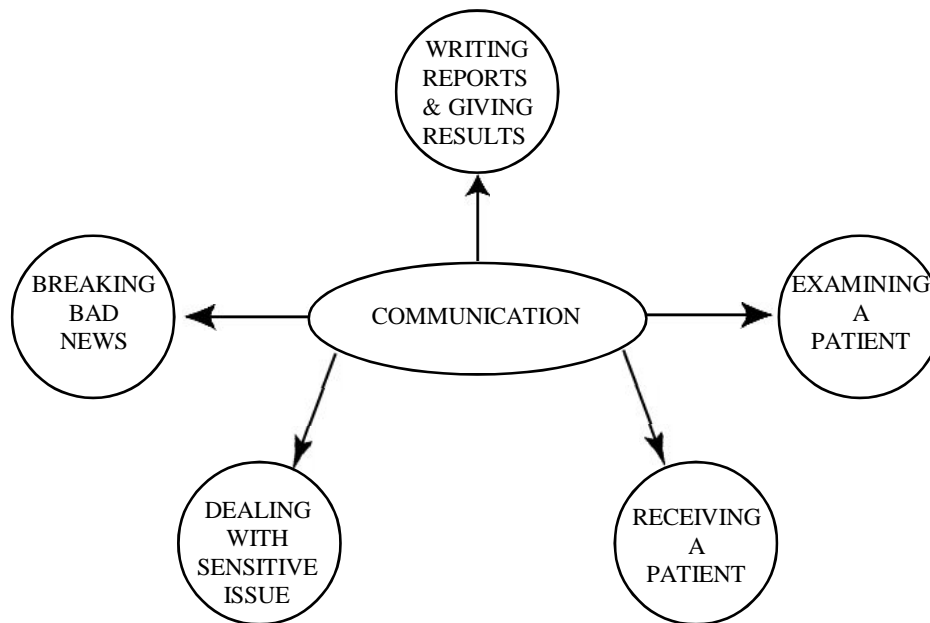


Figure 2

Figure 2 depicts that healthcare providers must possess strong communication skills which would help them in building a good team of other healthcare providers and doctor-patient relationships. A paramedic or healthcare professional should have skills oriented to communication, like questioning skills, decision-making skills, problem-solving skills, good interpersonal skills, writing skills, reporting skills (both oral and written), handling difficult patients, and so on, along

with the four major skills of the English language (listening, reading, speaking, and writing). The skill of questioning would help them in collecting the patient’s history, which would in turn help them with their diagnosis; decision-making skills would enable them to take decisions on the plan of treatment. The foremost skill needed for a healthcare professional is the art of listening, because poor listening could lead to clinical errors. Equal importance must be given to the tone

of speech, especially when dealing with patients or sensitive issues, and when breaking bad news to the patient or the caregivers. Being empathetic and courteous would increase understanding of treatment and improve compliance, leading to improved health. Communication or language barriers between the healthcare professions and the patients can impede effective communication and patient comprehension of health-related information, putting them at risk. A study, *Hospital discharge preparedness for patients with limited English proficiency* says that mixed methods of bedside interpreter-phones show that hospitalized patients with LEP experience significant adversities in patient safety and outcomes of care. Compared to English speakers, patients with LEP are more likely to have serious adverse events during hospitalization, particularly due to communication errors.

Sources Available

To help and support the English teaching facilitators there are some online sources available, such as medicalenglish.com, hospitalenglish.com, and books on medical English. These sources help the language facilitators gather the basics of medical knowledge, with supportive materials for teaching medical terminology, cloze passages on some known or unknown diseases, listening comprehensions related to functions of the human body, and so on, which would add strength to the teachers.

Research questions

1. Can English be considered as a language of the elites?
2. Should language teachers equip

themselves in both general and the specific purposes of learning the language skills?

3. Should language teachers undergo special training to cater to the needs of the learners of any specific field?

The below-attached questions were prepared by the researcher and were orally asked of the students. General responses were given, which showed that the students have identified the need for English. They listed certain situations where they felt they strongly needed good communication skills. For example,

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|---|---|---------------------------|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Oral presentation (seminar) 2. Viva voce (Practical sessions both internal as well as the university exam)
Speaking 3. Report writing (investigation/clinical reports to read as well as to write) - | } | Reading
and
Writing |
|---|---|---------------------------|
4. Choice of words (vocabulary): the medical terms
 5. Pronunciation of terms both common and medical – intertwined (Listening and Reading)
 6. Lack of understanding to write on their own after reading a text (During examinations – could understand the concept but find difficulty in putting them in words). With these inputs, this paper focuses on how the healthcare providers can be helped in enhancing their ability to fit into their job of serving society.

Conclusion

To conclude, English, both as a language and

a skill, is to be mastered, especially in a profession, where clinical errors are not acceptable. Good communication among the members of the healthcare team is essential; this ensures effective treatment of patients. On the other hand, poor communication skills, like lack of understanding and poor listening or documentation of reports will affect the efforts of the entire team, who serve to help the patients. Therefore, it is good to equip oneself with good communication skills to accept better opportunities that come one's way.

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