A Case Study of English Language Skills Used by Pediatricians at Chonburi Hospital

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Abstract

This study investigated the English language skills and communication tasks used by pediatricians at Chonburi Hospital. The purposes of the study are to identify what language skill — reading, writing, speaking, and listening are mostly used by pediatricians at Chonburi Hospital, and to explore how pediatricians perceive the importance of each language skill.

The subjects of the study were fifteen pediatricians at Chonburi Hospital. The data were collected by means of a questionnaire. Frequencies, percentages and means were used for data analysis. The findings showed that the subjects mostly used the reading skill, followed by writing, listening, and speaking skills respectively. Reading and writing were perceived as the most important skills in their profession, followed by listening and speaking skills.

Key Words: English language skills, communication tasks, pediatricians, Chonburi Hospital
1. Introduction

There are three main reasons why English skills are needed by medical doctors at Chonburi Hospital. Firstly, Medical Education for Students of Rural Areas Program (MESRAP), the affiliation between Faculty of Medicine, Chulalongkorn University and Chonburi Hospital by the Ministry of Health, is located in this hospital. MESRAP scholarships send medical doctors to study abroad. Secondly, there is a post-graduate training program called 'subspecialty'. As a result, medical doctors from overseas come for a study tour to see the possibility of this subspecialty program. Lastly, there is another special program which belongs to Faculty of Tropical Medicine, Mahidol University. This program requires international post-graduate students to take a short course in tropical diseases at Chonburi hospital.

This study aims at investigating what language skills - reading, writing, speaking, listening, and a communication task, is mostly used by pediatricians at Chonburi Hospital. It also examines how pediatricians perceive the importance of each language skill. The result of the study can be used to organize an in-house English training program for medical doctors. Since the cost of English training programs is very high, it is crucial to appropriately plan an English program to meet the needs of the medical doctors at Chonburi Hospital.

2. Literature Review

The Educational Commission on Foreign Medical Graduates: English for Medical Purposes proposes the communicative tasks required by international doctors. They are divided into three categories as follows:

Interaction with other professionals include collaborating with other members of the hospital medical team in diagnosing and treating patients; presenting and discussion cases to supervisors; teaching and supervising junior members of the team; answering pages and phone calls; requesting tests, results, and consultations, interacting with other healthcare providers such as subspecialist physicians; nurses, physical therapists, social workers, and occupational therapists; reading and writing notes in charts. Interaction with patients and families requires great sensitivity and a high level of skill in interpersonal communication. Some of the tasks are taking a history, performing a physical exam, explaining diagnostic procedures and medical conditions, and negotiating treatment plans. Academic interaction requires physicians to read and write
journal articles; collaborating on research projects, present at conferences, attend lectures and participate in discussion.

Pleansaisurb (1984) surveyed the needs, wants and problems of the medical students at Mahidol University for the use of the four skills of English in their studies and their future careers. The results showed that reading was the most needed skill in their studies and future career. Writing was considered as the second most needed skill, followed by listening and speaking skills respectively. Wanaisiree (1985) also examined the current needs in using English and the preferred English course of medical graduates in clinical science at Ramathibodi Hospital, Mahidol University. The findings showed that reading and writing were the most needed skills, similar to the findings of Pleansaisurb (1985).

Similarly, Intratat studied the real situation of dentist graduates at Chiang Mai University in terms of English language use. The findings revealed that reading was the most required skill in the dentists’ opinion. Chia et al (1998) surveyed medical students at Chung Shan Medical College in Taiwan. The results showed that reading was the most important skill, followed by listening, writing and speaking.

3. Methodology

The subjects consisted of 15 pediatricians at Chonburi Hospital. Seven were males, and eight were females. All of them passed at least nine years of education. The first six years were called general doctors, and the other three were called specialists in pediatric fields. The instrument was a questionnaire which was modified from the questionnaire designed by Educational Commission on Foreign Medical Graduates which suggested communication tasks needed by international medical graduates. The researcher handed in the questionnaires to 15 pediatricians at Chonburi Hospital. Finally, fifteen completed questionnaires were returned (100%).

4. Results

The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to calculate frequencies, percentages, and means for the data obtained.
In all, only the scales 'sometimes' and 'occasionally' were rated by the majority of the respondents. The results of the survey of respondents' perception toward English language skill.

Table 6 The degree of importance of each language skill

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<th>Skills</th>
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<th>1 (Very important)</th>
<th>2 (Important)</th>
<th>3 (Fairly important)</th>
<th>4 (Slightly important)</th>
<th>5 (Not important)</th>
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</table>

In conclusion, reading, writing, listening and speaking were important respectively.

5. Conclusion and Recommendation

Research Question No.1: What English skills are mostly used by pediatricians at Chonburi Hospital?

The reading skill was the most frequently used, followed by writing, listening, and speaking skills respectively. This is because being a medical doctor is a life-time learning. The majority of them have to cope with the amount of various kinds of reading tasks.

Research Question No.2: To what extent do they use each communication task?

All writing skills which were rated 'always' are professional career tasks for them to function their jobs effectively. In terms of the reading skill, according to the mini-talk, they have to explore new knowledge for their whole career life. For the listening skill, medical doctors need to communicate with others, and to learn new knowledge. For speaking tasks, they need to discuss with other doctors and advise junior doctors.
Research Question No.3: How do they perceive the importance of each language skill?

The results showed that reading and writing skills were very important whereas speaking and listening skills were perceived as being important. All those communication tasks are required by medical professionals in order to function their careers effectively.

It is recommended that appropriate English training programs provided to them should meet their needs. Second, from the mini-talk, pediatricians need an in-house English training course based on speaking and listening skills. Other research focusing on all fields of medical doctors in all hospitals both state and private hospitals should be conducted. Second, other research should be conducted in finding out problems of using English skills and communication tasks of Thai medical doctors at Chonburi Hospital or the whole province.

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Bibliography


