

Status Quo Aspects of EFL Nursing Students' Communication in English at MoH Technical Nursing Institute

Emad Albaaly

Associate Professor of Curriculum
and Instruction of English at Faculty of Education,
Suez Canal University

emad.albaaly@edu.suez.edu.eg

Abstract

English is used in communication worldwide by EFL students and their EFL instructors during science learning and teaching. EFL nursing students and instructors are not supposed to be different from the international setting. However, it was observed that this was not the case for both instructors and students enrolled in the two-grade Ismailia Technical Health Institute and the mother tongue, Arabic, not English, was used considerably. The aim of this study was to unveil the aspects of the problem, including time when Arabic was used, causes of the problem, exact percentages of English and Arabic used in communication, existing barriers to communication in English, and recommendations for intervention. The study involved two-year two majors, namely Medical Laboratories and General Nursing, covering the communication languages used in all subject areas. The study adopted a qualitative approach conducting two separate semi-structured interviews with the same set of questions for both students and their instructors. The findings indicated that the majority of instructors of the two-year two majors used Arabic because they quite mistakably assumed their students had a low proficiency level of English. The findings also revealed that the percentage of English used in communication was remarkably low (10% to 30%). Recommendations offered by both students and instructors included adding a course for oral communication, and students saw that the time for the English subject be increased. They further suggested instructors should allow students time to express their views and engage them in discussions, debates, interactions, and motivate them to use the language. The students finally see that instructors should have better pronunciation and sentence structures and persistence to use the language. The study adopted the recommendations of both students and instructors and added to them.

Keywords: *Quo Aspects, EFL Nursing Students, MoH Technical Nursing Institute*

Introduction

Communication in English is considered necessary in order for EFL (English as a foreign Language)/ESL (English as a Second Language) students to improve their English language. It is claimed that classroom communication in English is indispensable to EFL/ESL nursing students. This claim is supported by Santos (2021) one of whose aims was investigating why nursing students thought developing English as a Second language (ESL), and hence communication, was important to them. It was found out that 'the interest in career development and personal consideration' were among the most important

factors that encouraged students for foreign language learning, and hence communication (Ibid: 1).

A number of other reasons point out why nursing students need communication. The nursing job which they have after they have graduated is challenging and the nurses need to keep themselves updated to cope with the advancements in the healthcare field (Abraham, 2021:484). Also, They need to know EFL and have cultural awareness. These are seen as highly important elements for nurses to work with patients from various parts of the world (Santos, 2018).

Nursing students need to communicate for another reason. Not only do they look for ways to acquire new knowledge, awareness and responsiveness to various viewpoints and arguments, but also they learn how to structure ideas and appropriate ways of presentation, thus developing necessary skills, and encountering challenges of classroom debates during education (Nurakhir et al, 2020).

Challenges during communication

Nursing students have many challenges in communication in English (Hopkins et al, 2021). As one, Santos (2021: 2) believes that learning a foreign language is not seen relaxing by most nursing students, particularly those aspiring after completing their internships in the hospital. However, it is actually admitted that motivation gives them momentum to TEFL classrooms (Ibid, 2021: 2). Wulandari et al (2021) found that while speaking in English, a component of communication in English, EFL students had more challenges, such as lack of self-confidence, fear of committing mistakes, ineffective class schedule, irrelaxing audience behaviour, lack of vocabulary, grammatical imprecision, improper pronunciation, hard and unintriguing topics, immediate corrective feedback, besides problems coordinating group work. The study also added that, as listeners, the students had difficulties caused by their lack of adequate background knowledge, unfamiliar vocabulary, anxiety, speakers' inappropriate pronunciation, too fast or too long presentations, various accents, sound clarity. The study added a number of other challenges: seating, room temperature, poor concentration, and uncaring speakers. The study referred these problems to a number of factors: language proficiency, cognitive competencies, physical environment, and most prominently social, psychological, and emotional factors. All the above mentioned challenges/problems are seen to lead to poor communication in English.

Communication implications

It is noteworthy that communication reflects the interaction which happens between individuals for transmission of knowledge through verbal or non-verbal cues and causes understanding. The process requires the use of a message, a medium of transmission, which the receiver receives and decodes through the medium of receipt (Daniel, 2013). Elements involved are the sender, the receiver, the message, the channel, the environment, feedback, context, and interference (Sivarajan, 2021).

To develop/ enhance communication, instructors are advised to use cooperative work (Abraham, 2021), debates (Nurakhir, 2020), student-centred activities (Núñez, 2019), blended learning rather than online learning (Moradimokhles, 2020), Blended learning, i.e. fostering ESP skills including communication (Mulyadi, 2020).

It is also proven that nurses' communication skills and medical discourse in English can be developed in hospital context where English is used through interacting with

other English speaking staff, having small talks, establishing relationships, having discussions, and doing nursing tasks. (Lu, 2020).

It is worth mentioning that communication includes knowing conversation and everyday language practices but also understanding, and using professional language, acronyms, as well as country-specific medicine names (Lum et al., 2015; Viken et al., 2018).

Nursing students in Egypt are expected to learn all their subjects in English being the international medium of science and communication as depicted earlier. The subject matter is then supposed to be delivered in English, and based on this, communication in English between an instructor and students is vital. However, it was observed that at the Technical Health Institute in Ismailia, not all communication happens in English, and both instructors and their students considerably, consistently and persistently use Arabic, the mother tongue, to manipulate knowledge at lectures and clinical practice work. This instigated researching into and unveiling the aspects, including causes, of this improper communication problem as both instructors and students should speak in English at least in regard to the subject matter. Therefore, the aim of this study was to address this and reach a number of recommendations to solve the problem. In an attempt to investigate this problem, the research, then, handled the following questions:

- 1) When do instructors use Arabic?
- 2) When do students use Arabic?
- 3) Why do instructors use Arabic?
- 4) Why do students use Arabic?
- 5) How much time in percentage is English used in communication?
- 6) What are the existing barriers hindering communication in English?
- 7) What are the possible means to preventing communicating in Arabic while teaching and learning theory and clinical practice?

It is noteworthy that this study is delimited to both the instructors of the General Nursing Major (G.N.M.) and relating students as well as instructors of the Medical Laboratories Major (M.L.M.) and their students at the Technical health institute in Ismailia, a body affiliated to Egypt' MoE, with a two-year study system.

Methodology

The study adopted a qualitative approach. Two semi-structured interviews (i.e. following Morse's description (2012) with both the instructors and the students had to take place (See Appendix A). The interview with instructors first had general establishing questions about the interviewees' name, age, experience in teaching, minor specialty, background knowledge about their students including their level of English at previous stages. Then, other main questions were then asked:

- 1) When do instructors use Arabic?
- 2) When do students use Arabic?
- 3) Why do instructors use Arabic?
- 4) Why do students use Arabic?

- 5) How much time in percentage is English used in communication?
- 6) What are the existing barriers hindering communication in English?
- 7) What are the possible means to preventing communicating in Arabic while teaching and learning theory and clinical practice?

It is noteworthy that each question in the interview addressed one of the study questions.

The interview with students included preliminary questions about their name, age, sex, and major. The interview consisted of the same questions as that with the instructors from the perspectives of students.

Three jurors majored in Curriculum and Instruction of English at the Suez Canal University checked the Face validity of the interview questions. The interview was to be sent via the WhatsApp Application. It returned with their judgments two days later. They agreed on the usability of the questions and no editing was required.

Participants

The participants of this study were ten EFL instructors teaching in two majors, Medical Laboratories (henceforward M.L.M.) and General Nursing (henceforward G.N.M.). The study investigated the views of 100 2nd year EFL students (30 M.L.M. and 70 G.N.M.) and 100 1st year EFL students (30 M.L.M. and 70 G.N.M.). All students were chosen randomly and reprehensively. It is worth noting that the M.L.M. students had an excellent grade that ranged from 92 to 95% at the Secondary Stage Exam.

The G.N.M. students partly consisted of General Secondary Stage students (i.e. whose grade at the Secondary Stage ranged from 90 to 93% at the General Secondary Stage). They also partly consisted of students joining from Technical Secondary schools, i.e. as the Secondary Stage in Egypt had both types, General Secondary and Technical Secondary with the former better in Education and English than the latter.

With respect to the English relating to the students joining the two majors from the General Secondary Stage, they were seen as having quite a good level regarding reading, writing, grammar, writing, but quite unsteady, unreliable instruction of good speaking, and almost little instruction of listening at the Stage. As to students joining the G.N.M. from Technical Secondary schools, they were considered as having an extremely low proficiency level of English. They represented a third of the G.N.M. students.

The EFL Instructors were eight teaching twelve subjects in the two majors. The majority instructors were appointed as the MoH (Ministry of Health) Directorate in Ismailia, and they were summoned on part-time basis. Those were physicians, pharmacists, blood analysts, or university staff, most of whom had their private work as well. A minority of those instructors were appointed full-time, i.e. a number of instructors of the G.N.M.

Results & Discussion

To answer the six study questions, information from both the instructors and students in the two majors was gathered and analysed. The following section covers answers to the Interview questions on the part of students and instructors. The first interview question from the point of view of the two student majors: Technical Laboratories and General Nursing, respectively, was analysed. The first question asks, 'When do instructors use Arabic?' All (N.30) students in the M.L.M. (i.e. within the two grades) agreed that when instructors assumed that students would not understand technical and medical language, they use English.

However, it is necessary it be said that the M.L.M. had quite good skills in the language as proven by their mark in English at the Secondary Stage (from 43 to 50 out of fifty; that is 86% or above). This was supported by the interview with students: when students were asked about their communication skills, they (30 for each major) said, "60% of us are good communicators, but our instructors wouldn't give us a chance."

In answer to the same question, the 1st and 2nd year G.N.M. students (N. 70) adopted the same answer as that of the M.L.M. and added that 'we ask our instructors to use Arabic as it makes us quickly gain knowledge quickly and is easier to use'. 'Instructors are very helpful in that respect,' they clarified. Obviously, it is thought that because a considerable number of the students come from Technical Secondary schools, and because the majority of other students did not care about the language used, as observed by the researcher being one of those instructors, the whole students did not want to trouble themselves with English and related unfamiliar medical terms. They kept saying, "We do not want to trouble ourselves studying English terms," and added that "We love Arabic." This reflected the laziness of those students, and, more peculiarly, embodied the negative practices of the majority of instructors, as well as the absence of encouragement. This finding is consistent with what Santos (2021: 2) noted. However, students' level of communication can be raised through motivating them (Ibid, 2021: 2). Therefore, motivation is seen a key to this malpractice.

In answer to the second question, 'When do students use Arabic?', in the interview with instructors of the two majors, five of the six instructors covered mentioned that the students' level of English was not appropriate. They explained that, given time constraints, they needed to finish lectures more quickly, as using English in communication would mean more time to be spent to point out terms. (Here, it must be clarified that most instructors did not care about giving the lecture time allocated by the MoH.) However, being an instructor at the institute, it was observed that it was a familiar practice to hurry things up with students (e.g. using Arabic was one way of doing this; providing little information was another). This was supported by the view of the students when answering the third study question which answer is mentioned next. In addition, the majority of instructors

were not committed to an MoH code of conduct detailing ideal practices, as there was no written record of one.

In answer to the second interview question from the students' viewpoints, the students mentioned that 'when instructors saw or thought we wouldn't understand English, they reverted to Arabic'. This asserts this persistent wrong practice on the part of instructors and uncaring nature of the students as they uttered no comment to their instructors.

In answer to the third interview question, Why do instructors use Arabic?, Instructors mentioned whether in the interview or the questionnaire that the students' level of English was not adequate. A number of them (3 in six for both majors teaching the two grades) said that students were happy when we used Arabic. (The same point was confirmed in the interview with students.) However, the reason behind this was that students wanted to feel relaxed, a point supported by Santos (2021).

In answer to the fourth interview question, Why do students use Arabic?,

Students (N. 17 M.L.M. students in both grades; 70 G.N.M. students in both grades) said that 'our terms and vocabulary were too limited, and we had not taken any language courses other than the Secondary Stage ones'. This was also supported when M.L.M. students assured that 60% of them had excellent language skills including communication in the language. From another perspective, G.N.M. students (N. 50 for each grade) said that the majority of them did not have good competency.

In answer to the fifth interview question, how much time in percentage is English used in communication?, students in both majors asserted that the vast majority of instructors (90%) used Arabic, except when teaching the Communication and English subjects for the 1st grade for both majors, and the English subject only in the 2nd grade for both majors). According to the students in both majors in both grades (i.e. all the participants), the exact percentage of English in subjects other than the subjects mentioned above was only 10%. The following figure (1) shows students' views about the amount of English used in comparison with the amount of Arabic used in communication.

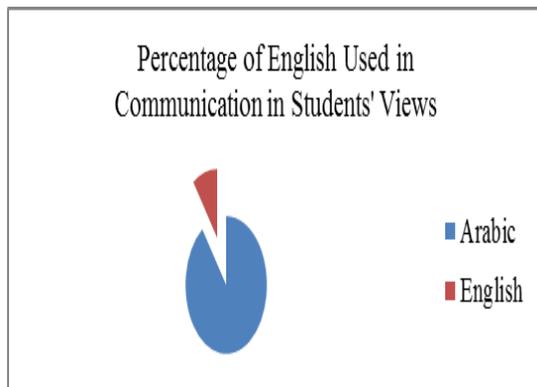


Figure 1. The amount of English used in comparison with the amount of Arabic used in communication

Students pointed out that they were not allowed to express themselves, nor engage in discussions, interactions, or debates in English. They said that "most instructors were in a hurry and they were not even committed to the lecture time." As mentioned earlier, the majority instructors were appointed as the MoH Directorate in Ismailia, and they were summoned on part-time basis. Those were physicians, pharmacists, blood analysts, or university staff, most of whom had their private work as well. A minority of those instructors were appointed full-time, i.e. a number of instructors of the G.N.M.

As regards instructors, they clarified that because they assumed students had not had a good level of English, as previously explained by students in answer to the first question, they did not use much English. For the first grade and in both majors, except for the English and communication subjects in both of which English was used 90% of the time, English was used 30% of the time. Likewise, for the second grade in both majors, except for the English subject in which English was used 90% of the time, the usage percentage was only 30%. This reveals how clear the problem was engraved and reflects relating volume. The following Figure (2) reflects the amount of English used as seen by instructors.

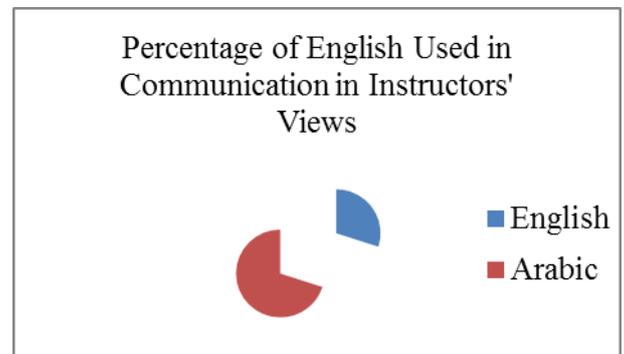


Figure 2 reflects the amount of English used as seen by instructors

Obviously, there is a slight difference between the percentage of Arabic and English used in the views of both Students (10 and 90% for English and Arabic, respectively) and instructors (30% and 70%, the same sequence). This might be referred to the defensive nature of instructors who have a belief that they have a deficiency using English in communication. It seemed that they raised the percentage of English using not for the situation to appear the worst. Thus, it is claimed that students' percentages of English and Arabic usages (10% and 90%, respectively) is seen more reliable

In answer to the sixth question, What are the existing barriers to communication in English, students referred this to a number of factors the mispronunciation of their instructors, the peculiarity of terms, the usage of Arabic, arbitrary grammatical mistakes of instructors, big student

numbers, and low proficiency level of approximately 40% of the students (the majority of which in the G.N.M.).

Two points here must be highlighted: instructors' mispronunciation and arbitrary grammatical structures. These can be referred to the fact that most instructors are above fifty years of age and they followed an educational study system where English was mostly taught by unspecialised teachers when they were young.

One more point to mention is student big numbers. The two-year two major students had classes of over 100 students. It is to be mentioned that this does not foster communication at all.

The instructors focused only on one barrier: students' low proficiency in English in English. However, it must be claimed that because instructors needed to finish lectures and practical sessions earlier as they had other businesses, they did not allow students to express themselves. This claim is supported by students' views implied in all of the answers to the five questions addressed above.

In an answer to the seventh question asking for recommendations from both instructors and students to bridge this gap in communication, the instructors' and students' suggestions were divergent or different-scoped at times. Meanwhile instructors saw that students should have conversation courses at the Secondary Stage, students saw that they only needed those courses at the institute. Students added that they needed to memorise more vocabulary including medical terms and suggested English speaking and listening practice in a subject separate from the English subject, one that is allocated for oral communication only. Otherwise, they suggest that the time for the English subject be increased to four hours a week and communication be included. They also see that instructors should have better pronunciation and sentence structures and give students time to express their views and engage in discussions and debates and that instructors should challenge and motivate students to speak the language. They added that the instructors should persist in using English. This view also copes with Santos' (2021: 2). However, the present study is different in that students see that their instructors do not generally use proper pronunciation and structures, let alone this study is of an investigative nature in an Egyptian setting.

Conclusions

- It has been seen that Arabic, not English, is used by the majority of instructors in the majority of subjects in both of the two grades. Unlike what is implied in many previously addressed studies, e.g. Abraham (2021), Santos (2021), Nurakhir et al (2020), Mulyadi (2020), and Lu (2020), Santos (2018), Viken et al. (2018), Lum et al. (2015), Arabic, not English, is dominant in communication among students to students, instructors to students, and students to instructors. Although these studies see English as the language of science communication and as essential in communication, the status quo at the MoH Ismailia Technical Health Institute is not so.
- The situation regarding communication in English at MoH Technical Nursing Institute in Ismailia definitely

needs to be reconsidered. This might warn those in charge at the MoH to consider the whole situation at other MoH institutes as well. This may look pressing.

- In this study, it has been seen that students are not supported by communication courses, nor are they motivated to speak in the language. The general teaching is done in Arabic and instructors have pronunciation problems. This does not help the nursing students in their future job settings where English is used among the clinical staff. Nor does it help with the medical terms which should be there in their communication. Nor does it equip a nurse in an international environment.
- Therefore, intervention is needed. More time should be allocated for improving communication in English. Instructors must be trained, use English persistently, and sign a code of conduct where the language of classrooms and clinical or lab practice must be practiced in English 100% of the time. Also, Instructors must encourage students to express their views and use debates, blended learning, discussions, competitions, interactions to improve their communication in English. Instructors must find ways to facilitate delivery of medical terms essential in classroom and clinical work.

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Appendix A

Dear Professor/ Instructor,

This is a questionnaire investigating the status quo of the communication in English between you and your students and vice versa and between the students themselves in your subject matter. You are kindly requested to tick the choice which applies to your case for each statement in the questionnaire below. I would be grateful if you add your reason for each choice as well. Your comments and recommendations are highly appreciated.

Appendix A

The Interview for Communication in English for Nursing students and Instructors

General information About students

Name:.....
Age:.....
Gender:.....
Specialty:.....
Grade

General information About instructors

Name:.....
Age:.....
Gender:.....
Specialty:.....
Last Degree:.....
Teaching load: (e.g. 2 hrs., 4 hrs., etc.).....
Experience in teaching:.....
Grade taught: (1st, 2nd years, or both).....

Please, answer the following interview questions:

1. When do instructors/professors and students use Arabic?
.....
2. Why do you use Arabic, if you have to?
.....
3. Why do you think students use Arabic?
.....
4. How much time in percentage do you use English in theoretical and practical sessions?
.....
5. What are the barriers to communication in English, i.e. those related to the speaker, the receiver, the message, the channel, the environment, the feedback, the context, the peculiarity of terminology, etc.?
.....
6. What are the possible recommendations for preventing communicating in Arabic while the teaching and learning process?
.....

Thanks for your Efforts.

Regards,
Assist. Prof. Emad Albaaly

*The same set of questions are asked to both instructors and students.