CONTENT-BASED INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS FOR NURSING COMMUNICATION SKILLS 1 CLASSES

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ABSTRACT This study focused on the development of language tasks for freshman nursing students enrolled in Communication Skills 1 at the University of Baguio. The descriptive method was utilized using questionnaires to assess the learning needs of students. Text analysis was employed to identify the common rhetorical patterns in the textbooks as basis for writing the materials. Language tasks were designed based on the results of needs and text analyses. Usefulness of the tasks was evaluated by students, English, and content teachers using weighted means. Analysis of variance (ANOVA) was employed to test significant differences among the evaluations of the three groups of respondents. Results revealed that 100% of the student-respondents claimed that learning the English language is helpful in various ways and the skills needed by the students were speaking, followed by listening, reading, and writing. The students expected to improve their speaking skills, to speak fluently, to learn more vocabulary related to their field of specialization, and to improve their skills in listening, and in reading. Difficulties in reading were unlocking the meaning of unfamiliar words, getting the main idea, distinguishing facts and opinion, organizing ideas, and relating texts with real life situation. Identified difficulties in writing included, choosing the right words, organizing ideas, writing grammatically correct sentences, and linking ideas in a paragraph; those in listening consisted of understanding grammatically correct sentences, understanding instructions/directions, and understanding lectures. Difficulties in speaking were pronouncing words clearly using the right words, and expressing ideas. Students learned best by lecture-demonstration, lecture-discussion, and student-teacher interaction; majority rated 3 hours/week on the number of hours in learning English. Factors contributory to learning English were the teacher, books/newspapers/magazines, films/radio/television, home, and friends. Rhetorical patterns identified as useful to the students were physical description, process description, classification, cause and effect, and problem-solution. The students' assessment on their proficiency in English was good. Process description was the most common rhetorical pattern found in nursing textbooks followed by definition, classification, physical description, and problem-solution. A total of 17 communicative tasks were developed based on needs and text analyses. The tasks were evaluated very useful by the students (3.60), English teachers (3.60), and content teachers (3.26). In general, the materials were rated with a mean of 3.49 (very useful).

INTRODUCTION

Educators continue to explore new ways in order to address the problem of students who lack language ability. Such known phenomenon is regarded as a frustration that resulted to the assessment of the various methods of teaching as well as models in instruction. One model that is popular today is content-based instruction. This is a method using content as a means of learning a language. Both content and language are equally important and are given the priorities. Brinton, Snow, and Wesche (1989) describe it as an instruction that focuses upon the substance or meaning of the content that is being taught. This is in contrast to "general literacy" or "general language" instruction, which uses topics or subject matter simply as a vehicle for teaching reading and writing, or the grammar or other "mechanics" of English language, as general processes.

According to Chamot and O’Malley(1994) as cited by Herrero (2005) there are at least four reasons for incorporating content into English as a Second Language (ESL) class. First, content provides students with an opportunity to develop important knowledge in different...
subject areas. Second, students are able to practice the language functions and skills needed to understand, discuss, read about, and write about the concepts developed. A third reason is that many students exhibit greater motivation when they are learning content than when they are learning language only. Finally, content provides a context for teaching students learning strategies. This focus on content knowledge, however, does not require a sacrifice of linguistic skills. On the contrary, Content-Based Instruction (CBI) implies a dual commitment to language and content-learning objectives (http://revista.inie.ucr.ac.cr/articulos/2-2005/archivos/oral.pdf).

The advent of CBI in classes is seen to be part of the innovation in language teaching. Though it is not totally new, its proliferation is becoming wider in scope among teachers who are handling language particularly English classes. Mohan as cited by Curtain (1985) stressed:

“Language is not just a medium of communication but a medium of learning across the curriculum. The goal of integration is both language learning and content learning. Content-based classrooms are not merely places where a student learns a second language; they are places where a student gains an education.”

A key component of CBI is authenticity—both of the texts used in classroom and tasks that learners are asked to perform (Nunan, 2003). Shrum and Glisan (2000) cited Galloway’s definition of authentic texts as those written and oral communications produced by members of the same language and culture group. For Peacock (1997) authentic materials are materials that have been produced to fulfill some social purpose in the language community.

Authentic materials vary. Their variation accommodates different types of learners and at the same time, they contain the linguistic structures that students encounter and learn at the same time, these materials are in contact with real life.

Better understanding of content as well as development of language skills through the use of instructional materials is geared towards the study on “Content-Based Instructional Materials for Nursing Students;” thus, all the concepts mentioned above help shape the framework of this study.

This study aimed at developing instructional materials for freshman nursing students who are enrolled in Communication Skills 1 at the University of Baguio. Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions:

1. What are the learning needs of freshman nursing students enrolled in Communication Skills 1 at the University of Baguio?
2. What common rhetorical patterns of organization are found in the textbooks of nursing students?
3. What language tasks will be developed to meet the needs of the students?
4. How useful are the tasks as evaluated by:
   a) Students
   b) English Teachers
   c) Content Teachers?

METHODOLOGY

The study used the descriptive research. Questionnaires were administered to the freshmen to assess their learning needs. Text analysis was employed to identify the common rhetorical patterns in the textbooks as basis for writing the materials.

Language tasks were designed based on the results of the needs assessment and the usefulness of the tasks was evaluated using weighted means. The tasks were evaluated by the

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students, English teachers, and the content teachers handling major subjects in the College of Nursing. Analysis of variance (ANOVA) was employed to test significant differences in the evaluations of the three groups of respondents.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Learning Needs of Freshman Nursing Students Enrolled in Communication Skills 1

In this study, the learning needs include the assessment of the students on the importance of the English language; the skills needed by the students; their expectations from their course; their perceived difficulties in reading, writing, listening, speaking; situations in which they learn best; number of hours that they spend in learning the English language; factors that contribute in their learning of the language; rhetorical patterns that they found useful; and self-assessment of their English proficiency.

On the response of the students as regards the importance of the English language, 100% claimed that learning the language is worth and is helpful in various ways. Their response implies that they understand how the language could possibly help them successfully complete their course. Although the medium of instruction is English, they also accept the fact that all their books are written in English. Skills and procedures that they have to learn in their major subjects are also taught in English. Therefore, their skills in using the language will help them in understanding their content subjects. Mercer (1996) explains that there are three kinds of learning tasks, which a child may face and which are crucial to educational progress. These tasks include: learning the special ways of using English that apply in school because of the educational conventions and the technical language of curriculum subjects; learning to speak and write in English; and learning to use Standard English.

As regards the skills needed by the students was speaking (1.96), followed by listening (2.38), reading (2.51), and writing (2.94). The ranking of the four macro-skills suggests that the students felt the importance of communicating their ideas and feelings using the English language through verbal communication. Their perception also indicates their difficulties in terms of the four skills. Though the respondents have different responses, majority of them say that they needed most the skill in speaking.

On their expectations from the English course, they expected mostly taking up the course to improve their speaking skill (rank 1), to speak fluently (rank 2), to learn more vocabulary related to their field of specialization (rank 3). The least expected were to improve their skill in writing, to understand the lecture, to pass quizzes and exam, and to edit personal work to be less dependent to the teacher. Perceived difficulties in reading were unlocking the meaning of unfamiliar word, getting the main idea, distinguishing facts and opinion, organizing ideas, relating texts with real life situation, predicting outcome, making inference, drawing conclusions, identifying significant details, noting details, forming judgment. The least was sensing cause and effect relationship.

These expectations are consistent with what they have previously stated that their number one needed skill is speaking. Lazaraton (2006) clarifies that for most people the ability to speak a language is synonymous with knowing that language since speech is the most basic means of human communication. The students’ interest in learning and using the language is mirrored in the way they rank their expectations.

Perceived difficulties of students in writing included, choosing the right words, organizing ideas, writing grammatically correct sentences, linking ideas in a paragraph. On the other hand, the least of the difficulties was writing letters. This finding validates the weakness of the learners in terms of vocabulary building. In fact, it shows a close relationship between their
perceived difficulties in vocabulary. The situation suggests that the learners have to spend more time in reading for them to gain more vocabulary, which they will use in their writing activities.

Perceived difficulties in listening consisted of understanding grammatically correct sentences, understanding instructions/directions, understanding lectures, and the least was understanding questions. The finding is consistent with one of the problems of the students in writing – that is, grammar, which implies that there is a need for the teachers to pay close attention to this aspect of linguistic competence of the learners. Grammar is not just needed in writing activities, its importance can be seen equally in all the four skills.

Perceived difficulties in speaking was pronouncing words clearly followed by using the right words, expressing ideas, and the least was discussing issues. This implies that students are aware of the errors or mistakes they commit as they produce the sounds of English.

Situations in which the students learn best showed lecture-demonstration, lecture-discussion, and student-teacher interaction, which give an early indication of the awareness of the nursing students on the common approaches employed by most teachers handling their major subjects. Situations in which students did not consider so helpful are resource-speaker directed, interview, and teacher-directed.

On the number of hours they would like to spend in learning the English language, majority of them rated 3 hours/week followed by 2 hours/week, 5 hours/week, 4 hours/week, and 1 hour/week. The choice may have a strong influence on the number of hours that they spend in their classes. Most English classes are three-unit courses, which are equivalent to three hours in a week. The three hours are considered a minimal time in learning a language for intermediate or advanced learners.

With regard to the factors contributory to learning English were teacher, books/newspapers/magazines, films/radio/television, home, and friends. The teachers have a strong influence on their students’ language learning. They facilitate activities that will make the students use the language; they explain the rules of the language; and they model the language. Despite the presence of programmed activities on-line, the finding explains that the respondents recognize the significance of the teachers’ guidance in learning the language. As Gage (1965) emphasized:

“One obvious condition of learning is the classroom teacher upon whom the major responsibilities of devising the learning experience rests, hence there can be no doubt that the single most important factor in the instructional process, the important variable is the teacher.”

On the common rhetorical patterns perceived to be useful by the students, physical description, process description, classification, cause, and problem-solution. The least rhetorical patterns were comparison and contrast Ranking physical description first implies the importance of visualizing everything in order for them to understand a concept. The respondents are visual learners who are more comfortable than when they imagine what they are trying to learn.

In reference to the students’ assessment on their proficiency in English, majority rated themselves, “good.” The result of the assessment is not really bad; however, it is alarming the fact that the Philippines was once known as a people proficient in using the language. It matches several news reports that talk about the decline of English proficiency in the Philippines. An article published by Sunstar stated that the dominance of the Filipinos in the English language is now in the brink of becoming a myth. Neighboring Asian countries, which have willfully adopted no-nonsense measures to learn the English language are now catching up and have even overtaken the Philippines (http://www.sunstar.com.ph/cebu/cj/?p=33).

The Common Rhetorical Patterns of
Organization in the Textbooks of Nursing Students

There were nine books that were studied. Three were books recommended to second year students, another three for third year, and the last three were for fourth year students. Each book shows the number of occurrence of rhetorical patterns employed. It can be noted that there is no uniformity in terms of the number of occurrence of the said patterns.

Text analysis on rhetorical patterns revealed that process description was the most common, followed by definition. All the other identified patterns were: narration, exemplification, cause and effect, problem-solution, classification, listing, and physical description. The number of times that process description has been used in the different texts outnumbered all the other patterns. This indicates that the nursing course is full of procedures as reflected in all of the books that were studied.

Language Tasks that Meet the Needs of the Nursing Students

The communicative tasks that were developed based on the needs analysis of linguistic needs and rhetorical patterns were, physical and process description, definition, comparison and contrast, exemplification, classification, cause and effect, and problem-solution using different techniques.

On the other hand, the activities used in developing the tasks included: information gap task, opinion gap task, reasoning gap task, question and answer task, dialogue and role plays, matching type task, picture and picture story task, puzzle and problem task, discussion and decisions task, relaying instructions task, sequence task, and graphic organizer.

Evaluation of the Usefulness of the Tasks By Respondents

There are numerous criteria that are set to describe a good learning task. These criteria guided the researcher in developing the materials in this study. The usefulness of the materials will not however be determined without the evaluation of the students, the English, and the content teachers. A total of 40 students in each of the eight sections were asked to evaluate the materials. There were also seven English teachers and six content teachers who participated in the evaluation.

The evaluation criteria were patterned from the Nunan’s model (1988) with some modifications. There were two categories involved, these are: goals and rationale and activities. All respondents were asked to rate the language tasks based on a four-point likert scale: 4-very useful; 3-useful; 2-somewhat useful; and 1-not useful.

The evaluation conducted determined the usefulness of the tasks to the respondents. The result of the evaluation is also the basis in improving the tasks that were developed. Evaluation of the students as regards the usefulness of tasks revealed a computed weighted mean of 3.64 for the goals and rationale, with a descriptive equivalent of very useful; evaluation of the activities gave a general rating of 3.58, which is very useful. The English teachers rated the goals and rationale with a weighted mean of 3.75 and rated the activities, 3.44. The evaluation of content teachers as to goals and rationale had a weighted mean of 3.25 and the activities, 3.27. Results showed that there is a significant difference in their rating of the goals and rationale and no significant difference in their ratings of the activities.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings of the study, the following conclusions were drawn:

1. Needs analysis on the linguistic needs of students is a significant tool in the development and construction of language materials.
2. Text analysis with emphasis on rhetorical patterns of organization help material developers on the linguistic structures to be taught vis-à-vis the activities to be introduced.

3. Language tasks are designed to meet the communicative needs of students in the four macro skills.

4. An instrument to evaluate instructional materials is a necessary tool for language teachers to improve designed tasks.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and conclusions, the researcher recommends the following:

1. It is recommended that needs analysis be conducted before any attempt at developing language materials. Needs analysis will bring out the students’ linguistic needs in their field of specialization.

2. In this study, text analysis involved rhetorical patterns of organization. It is recommended that common linguistic structures go with each rhetorical pattern as an input in designing the activities.

3. The integration of content and language should be encouraged by the content and language teachers to coordinate for an effective implementation of content-based instruction. Hence, any language teacher who would like to use content in teaching the language should be equipped with enough content background for a more effective teaching.

4. In the evaluation of language materials, it is suggested that other criteria in task evaluation be included like grading of materials to reflect the continuity principle.

5. Language teachers are encouraged to continue attending seminars/workshops on content-based and task-based instructions for them to update their knowledge to understand the paradigm shift in language teaching.

6. The language tasks presented in this study should be further improved. Such improvement can be done through a continuous try out of the materials.

7. Administrators should continue supporting the teachers in the development of materials.

8. Researches can be conducted exploring other aspects that were not tackled in the present study.

9. Nursing students should master the skills in using the various rhetorical patterns; since, these are all useful in their field of specialization – in their community as well as hospital exposures.

10. The tasks developed is highly recommended to be adopted and adapted as instructional materials by the English Department of the University of Baguio.

11. Materials preparation should be part of the Graduate School program of the University of Baguio so that teachers can learn the principles of materials development and construction. This would encourage them to produce materials in their own field of specialization.

LITERATURE CITED


