

Evaluation checklist for English language teaching and learning for health science professionals

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ABSTRACT: English language learning is important for health science professionals. At present, for health science professionals who study English for specific purposes (ESP), many teaching and learning materials are available for various types of learner, language speaker, specialisation and even geographic region. However, how to locate the appropriate teaching and learning material is a challenging question. Therefore, it is vital that appropriate checklists and evaluation tools are found. For this study, a checklist for textbook evaluation was the instrument by which to investigate a contemporary ESP textbook in use at a health facility in the Republic of Korea. Two directions have emerged from the results of the study: first, the applications to which potential readers may put the teaching and learning material evaluation checklist; and second, identification of a potential textbook that may meet the needs of health science professionals in the East Asian region.

INTRODUCTION

The idea and direction of English for specific purposes (ESP) has been established for nearly half of a century, particularly in science language learning. Some researchers advocate that ESP be considered the teaching strategies and approaches instead of products or schools [1].

Over the past decade, and because of global developments and international trading, many countries and regions had begun and now need to provide services to international professionals. English is one of the most important foreign and instructional languages internationally. A large number of students, professionals and international workers must master English, so as to seek career advancements and promotions.

In the health sciences, in most of the cases, although the English language or other foreign language proficiency is not a requirement for registration, professionals and staff should understand at least one English/foreign language if they are to provide excellent services [2]. As a result, health facilities and agencies always provide foreign language training, professional development and onsite training for their health science professionals and staff.

Every year, a large number of international professionals and visitors come to South Korea for leisure and business. During the past decade, medical tourism developed as a result of excellent South Korean medical treatment and surgeries. Consequently, in-service health science professionals and staff in health facilities and agencies need to provide services to international travellers who wish to experience the medical services of South Korea [3]. Pre-service and recently graduated health science professionals and staff should have completed English language or foreign language training during their university undergraduate programmes [4].

Although the onsite and practical English or foreign language proficiencies of pre-service and recently graduated health science professionals and staff may not be as strong as in-service staff, the foundational skills and basic proficiency should be established through their undergraduate training [5]. In terms of English or foreign language training, there is significant room for improvement even for in-service, experienced health science professionals and staff [6].

In South Korea, a large number of health facilities and agencies provide foreign language training for their in-service professional workers and staff; languages include Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Japanese, Portuguese, Spanish and Thai [7]. However, English is still the most popular foreign language, because most of the secondary school and university graduates needed to complete years of English language study for graduation. Also, because English is the international language for communication, advanced English language skills could lead to potential career advancements and promotions. However, having appropriate teaching and learning materials [8] for the courses remain one of the greatest concerns for the administrators of the courses [9].

First, the leaders and administrators of the health facilities and agencies need to investigate the appropriate teaching and learning materials for their in-service staff, to meet the requirements of daily operations [8]. For large-scale health facilities and medical centres, although the language vocabulary and conversations could vary due to medical specialisations and categories, general health and medical English language skills are still useful. Therefore, identifying appropriate ESP textbook material is essential for the training of health science professionals and staff [10].

Second, language proficiencies are different for junior-level, mid-level and senior-level health science professionals and staff. Junior-level and recently graduated health science professionals and staff are trained for English or foreign language skills as a result of the well-established undergraduate curricula [11]. However, locating appropriate teaching and learning materials for the various levels is one of the challenging problems, particularly for large health facilities and agencies with a higher number of employees, specialisations and departments [12][13].

It is worth noting that if inappropriate teaching and learning materials are selected, negative reactions and human resource mismatches could occur, which could reduce the outcomes and learning experiences for both the health facilities and the learners [14].

Significance of the Study

In ESP for health science professionals and staff, a significant amount of teaching and learning material is available for different types of learners, languages, specialisations and even geographic regions [15]. However, how to locate the appropriate teaching and learning material is one of the most challenging problems for leaders and administrators.

Leaders and administrators may compare feedback from users of material and seek opinions from coursework instructors [16]. However, the feedback from external parties and users may not match the expectations and demands of their working environment and facilities. Therefore, seeking appropriate checklists and evaluations remain vital in locating appropriate teaching and learning material in ESP for health science professionals and staff [17].

Also, foreign language teaching is not noted for the development of evaluation checklists for teaching and learning material. There are just a few research studies that were focused on assessing and evaluating the appropriateness of ESP teaching and learning material for foreign language teaching and learning, particularly for health science professionals and staff [18]. Therefore, this research study was aimed at providing an ESP teaching and learning material evaluation checklist for foreign language teaching and learning [19][20].

METHODOLOGY

Participants

The participants for this research study were 48 senior-level health science professionals and staff studying an ESP language course of health-oriented English. All participants were experienced and senior-level health science professionals and staff who had completed at least 20 years of service in the field.

Site

The research study was completed at one of the health facilities in South Korea. However, the researcher was not the instructor of the ESP language course. Therefore, the researcher needed to contact the language course instructor. The course instructor was not a full-time employee of the health facility, but an external freelance worker for foreign language teaching.

Materials

The teaching and learning material to be evaluated was *Career Paths: Nursing* [21]. Based on the current Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) scale, the teaching and learning material was designed for A1, A2 and B1 users, which was basic to independent learners. Although there are different types of checklist and evaluation, the present study employed the evaluation checklist by Dos Santos [8]. The evaluation checklist comprised 10 items about the teaching and learning material. To make the evaluation checklist easy to understand, the researcher translated the checklist (i.e. survey), from English to Korean.

Procedure

- First, the researcher sent an invitation letter to the foreign language course instructor about the potential teaching and learning material evaluation checklist and research study.
- Second, once the instructor agreed with the research study, the instructor referred the researcher to their employers at the health facility.
- Third, the researcher forwarded the research protocol and the invitation letter to the administrator of the health facility.

- Fourth, once the upper management approved the research study, the researcher contacted the administrator for the nature, purpose and procedure for the research study. Also, the evaluation checklist had been sent to the administrator.
- Fifth, at the end of the ESP language course, the language instructor submitted the evaluation checklist survey to each of the participants for assessment. Once completed, the instructor returned the survey to the researcher for data analysis. All participants answered the survey, with 48 completed surveys.

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

The researcher aimed to collect the feedback and opinions from the teaching and learning material (i.e. textbook) users, who were the language learners. The researcher submitted the surveys only to the language learners. Although the feedback and opinions from administrators and instructors may be useful, the researcher collected the responds and perspectives from the learners who had studied the teaching and learning material.

The responses provided by the participants were rated from 5 (strongly agree SA); 4 (agree A); to 3 (neutral N); 2 (disagree D); and 1 (strongly disagree SD). The survey focused on how the teaching and learning material applied to the learners' application of health science, health science knowledge and practical health science skills. Outlined in Table 1 are the results of the checklist questions.

Table 1: Summary of the textbook material evaluation checklist.

Checklist question	SA (5)	A (4)	N (3)	D (2)	SD (1)
1. The textbook is easy to access, particularly the price	48	-	-	-	-
	100%	-	-	-	-
2. The textbook materials and exercises are contemporary and applicable	30	10	8	-	-
	62.5%	20.8%	16.7%	-	-
3. The students' exercises are applicable and useful	25	12	11	-	-
	52.1%	25%	22.9%	-	-
4. The textbook provides practice about essential pronunciation	31	10	7	-	-
	64.6%	20.8%	14.6%	-	-
5. The textbook is well organised	35	10	3	-	-
	72.9%	20.8%	6.3%	-	-
6. The textbook offers a balance between activities and lessons	29	10	9	-	-
	60.4%	20.8%	18.8%	-	-
7. The activities encourage learners to learn, communicate and participate	35	8	5	-	-
	72.9%	16.7%	10.4%	-	-
8. The grammar and vocabulary are introduced in realistic contexts	34	14	-	-	-
	70.8%	29.2%	-	-	-
9. The textbook offers a balance of four skills	25	20	3	-	-
	52.1%	41.6%	6.3%	-	-
10. The language usage is at the appropriate level for students	28	10	10	-	-
	58.4%	20.8%	20.8%	-	-

The survey indicated some significant findings about the present teaching and learning material. From the perspective of learners the feedback was positive. None of the learners indicated any negative opinions about this teaching and learning material. Based on these results, this teaching and learning material should match the expectations of experienced health science professionals and staff in the South Korean environment.

Evaluation Checklist Questions in Detail

The first checklist question was: *The textbook is easy to access, particularly the price*. Surprisingly, 100% of the participants chose strongly agree. The teaching and learning material at present costs 33,000 Korean Won (around \$US30). South Korea is one of the developed countries in the East Asian region, and most of the health science professionals and staff can afford to buy the teaching and learning material [20]. Also, because the human resource departments could order the teaching and learning material for the learners before the starting date, none of the learners should experience difficulties in ordering from bookstores and agencies.

The second checklist question was: *The textbook materials and exercises are contemporary and applicable*. A total of 62.5% of the learners chose strongly agree; 20.8% of the learners chose agree; and 16.7% of the learners chose neutral. More than 80% of the learners were positive that the textbook exercises are contemporary and applicable. Unlike general foreign language training, ESP language courses have a directed purpose. In the present research study, the teaching and learning material aimed to provide introductory training for experienced and senior-level health science professionals and staff, to understand health-oriented English for their daily use. Therefore, to be contemporary and applicable are two of the most important elements in this ESP teaching and learning material. Based on the statistics, the performance of this area has matched expectations.

The third checklist question was: *The students' exercises are applicable and useful.* A total of 52.1% of the learners chose strongly agree; 25% of the learners chose agree; and 16.7% of the learners chose neutral. Hence, the instructors should deliver the lessons based on the exercises and case studies in the teaching and learning material and the textbook. For this question, nearly 80% of the learners agreed that the exercises are applicable and useful for frontline health science professionals and staff in the South Korean environment. Although each department has technical terms and jargon, the introductory-level course and ESP teaching and learning material should cover most of the general terms and jargon.

The fourth checklist question was: *The textbook provides practice about essential pronunciation.* A total of 64.6% of the learners chose strongly agree; 20.8% of the learners chose agree; and 14.6% of the learners chose neutral. It was not surprising that more than 80% of the learners believed the pronunciation training was practical and applicable for their daily use. As the present teaching and learning material was aimed at beginning to lower-intermediate learners, the listening and speaking training should be appropriate for learners without prior experience.

The fifth checklist question was: *The textbook is well organised.* A total of 72.9% of the learners chose strongly agree; 20.8% of the learners chose agree; and 18.8% of the learners chose neutral. In this category, more than 80% of the learners believed the teaching and learning material was well-organised. The teaching and learning material comprise vocabulary, written exercises, case studies and peer-exchanges. This allows learners to share, learn, exchange ideas and practical skills within peer-groups. Based on the statistics, a large number of learners agreed with the current textbook organisation.

The sixth checklist question was: *The textbook offers a balance between activities and lessons.* A total of 60.4% of the learners chose strongly agree; 20.8% of the learners chose agree; and 18.8% of the learners chose neutral. More than 80% of the learners believed the teaching and learning material provided an excellent balance between activities and lessons. Unlike the teaching and learning material at secondary school level, adult teaching and learning material should focus on transferable skills and practice. One of the best ways to inculcate transferable skills would be by case studies and activities. For the present teaching and learning material, the connection between case studies and lesson contents was sound. Based on the statistics, the learners agreed with this balance of material.

The seventh checklist question was: *The activities encourage learners to learn, communicate and participate.* A total of 72.9% of the learners chose strongly agree; 16.7% of the learners chose agree; and 10.4% of the learners chose neutral. Nearly 90% of the learners agreed that the activities encouraged them to learn, communicate and participate with their peers and the instructor. Again, adult teaching and learning material should aim for interactive activities which allow learners to share and exchange learning experience. The current teaching and learning material support these elements.

The eighth checklist question was: *The grammar and vocabulary are introduced in realistic contexts.* A total of 70.8% of the learners chose strongly agree, and 29.2% of the learners chose agree. It is worth noting that 100% of the learners agreed that the grammar and vocabulary is applicable to their workplace, which was not surprising given the current ESP teaching and learning material for health science professionals and staff. However, each health facility, country, and even region may have their own vocabulary and jargon. As for South Korea, the learners agreed that this teaching and learning material was applicable in terms of grammar and vocabulary.

The ninth checklist question was: *The textbook offers a balance of four skills.* A total of 52.1% of the learners chose strongly agree; 41.6% of the learners chose agree; and 6.3% of the learners chose neutral. More than 90% of the learners agreed that the current teaching and learning material offered *four skills training* to the learners. It is worth noting that some publishers have divided four skills training into different textbooks. For example, listening and speaking were categorised into a separate series. However, the present teaching and learning material merged all four skills training into one series. The learners may acquire comprehensive knowledge from the lessons and exercises.

The tenth checklist question was: *The language usage is at the appropriate level for students.* A total of 58.4% of the learners chose strongly agree; 20.8% of the learners chose agree; and 20.8% of the learners chose neutral. Nearly 80% of the learners agreed that the teaching and learning material level matched their language level. The current teaching and learning material is designed for learners without prior English language skills and knowledge in the field of health science. However, without any prior English language knowledge, the lessons, case studies and activities could be difficult to understand. Therefore, there should be a placement test to identify that learners are at the appropriate level.

For learners without any prior experience in English, they should be placed into a general English language training course instead of an ESP course. All of the present groups of students were health science professionals and staff who have completed a post-secondary qualification. Therefore, ESP teaching should match their language proficiency.

CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

English for specific purposes is an important training activity for health science professionals and staff. Leaders and administrators in the health facilities and agencies do design and provide professional training for human resource development. However, how to locate appropriate teaching and learning materials is challenging. The present study was

based on an evaluation checklist, so as to assess the effectiveness and appropriateness of an ESP textbook for experienced and senior-level health science professionals and staff in the South Korean environment. Two directions were identified. First, the evaluation checklist was applied successfully to assess the performance and the effectiveness from the perspective of textbook users and learners [22]. Second, the result also indicated the appropriateness of an ESP textbook for health science professionals and staff who had beginning to lower-intermediate level of English language proficiency [23].

Two recommendations are advanced. First, as this study is applied research with an evaluation checklist as a means of textbook evaluation, readers of this study may also employ the evaluation checklist for other textbook evaluations. Although this study was focused on the appropriateness of an English language textbook for health science professionals, the nature of the evaluation checklist does not limit its application. Therefore, with minor edits this evaluation checklist could be applied to a textbook evaluation for any subject.

Second, teachers, students and school administrators may take this evaluation checklist as an ongoing professional development to implement and improve their teaching and learning material. In fact, although many sites may improve and update teaching and learning material due to ongoing science and technology developments, many sites and schools continue to use outdated and aged teaching and learning material, particularly in foreign language teaching and learning.

There is an ongoing demand to update teaching and learning material. The present evaluation checklist provides a clear direction for administrators to evaluate their teaching and learning material with short and clear instructions on the use of the checklist. Although the short evaluation checklist may not cover all essential elements, administrators can edit and add questions based on the nature of their teaching and learning material.

There are three future research directions and recommendations for readers and school administrators. First, future research may be focused on how to employ this evaluation checklist, where there are different cultural backgrounds, languages, subject matter, countries and textbook users. This will assess the performance of the present evaluation checklist tool.

Second, the readers of this article may report the developments and improvements of the current evaluation checklist [24]. For example, how can additional essential questions be implemented on top of the present checklist?

Third, as this study was focused on the textbook evaluation of foreign language teaching and learning material, textbook evaluation with different subject matter at different levels, and with different teaching strategies may have varying feedback. For example, students who tend to have teacher-centred teaching and learning strategies could provide different feedback. Future research studies may explore this for more development.

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