

An Assessment of the Suitability of Occupational English Writing Test for the Nurses of Medical Centre UMP

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Abstract--Language used in a particular profession is particular. This study conducted a test, Occupational English Writing Test, which is specially designed for medical practitioners, on a group of nurses. The researcher uses a case study where the cases are the nurses of medical centre University Malaysia Pahang. The medical centre of UMP maintains good medical unit where the nurses are trained and have to care diverse student patients. Therefore these nurses need to be proficient in English to treat the diverse student patients. The researcher administered a sample Occupational English Writing Test on all the nurses of the medical centre to give them an idea of the test and to see how they would perform in the existing test. After the test, the researcher got their opinion about the test through interview. The samples responded spontaneously. From the writing test and mainly from the interview it comes out that Occupational English Writing Test is appropriate to assess the nurses' English proficiency. As the nurses of Medical centre UMP, have to work in multi-lingual context, most of them answered well as the test based on their profession related English. From the interview, it comes out that Occupational English Writing Test is suitable to assess the nurses' English proficiency in working context. Based on the writing test performance and interview, the researcher has revised the sample Occupational English Writing test and will use the revised one to conduct a case study on the nursing students of University College Shah Putra, Kuantan and Kolej Kejururawatan, Kuantan. The case study result will be used further to determine the suitability of Occupational English Test in Malaysian context.

Keywords-- OET, English for nurses, Case study and Result.

I. INTRODUCTION

THE use of language varies with context. The language used in working context of specific profession is precise. A nurse uses language differently when she is working with patients than when in home [2]. They have to adapt the language they use to the communicative situation they are in. So to perform their job successfully, nurses need a good communication skill and the nurses who work in diverse context need to be proficient in the common language, English [1].

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Therefore their language proficiency needs to be assessed. It is more useful to test them with specific language test because ESP (English for Specific purpose) tests are based on an analysis of the target language use situation and highlights the real communicative needs of people in that situation, and also reflect the learning content and style [4]. Now nurses in Malaysia are not required to pass any language test which specifies medical English. This study aims to assess the suitability of Occupational English Writing Test, which is specific language test for medical practitioners, for the nurses of Medical Centre UMP.

OET (Occupational English Test) is an English language competency test for health practitioners. It is required by Australia, New Zealand and Singapore as an alternative to IELTS for health professionals. It aims to determine that the candidates have enough control over target language to perform their duty in occupational context. OET consists of four language skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing. The Speaking and Writing tests are profession-specific whereas the Listening and Reading tests are similar to all candidates. The Candidates for OET are from 12 medical professions: dentistry, dietetics, medicine, nursing, occupational therapy, optometry, pharmacy, physiotherapy, podiatry, radiography, speech pathology, and veterinary science. Now the largest numbers of candidates belong to Nursing, Medicine and Dentistry.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The extension of the health sector in Southeast Asia has enhanced the demand for nurses in Malaysia during the past several years. Now there are 19 public nursing schools and 35 private colleges of nursing in Malaysia. Taking all of them with poor academic results and English competency decreases the reliability and professionalism of nursing. Recently Public Health Assistant Minister Dr Jerip Susil (2012, 1 February) has said that the reasons behind 8,000 nursing graduates being jobless can be failure to sit for or pass the qualifying exam with the Malaysian Nursing Board (MNB), and poor English language proficiency. He informs that the Malaysian government's concentration is now on the jobless nurses who are facing the burden of repaying their study loans, which will affect the loaners and the parents who have sent their children for further studies in the hope of getting a secured future. Dr Jerip further mentions that. "Colleges that possess the license to train nurses should ensure that their programmes are tied up

with the MNB which is strict with the standard and qualification of nursing graduates,” he emphasizes that nurse graduates should adapt to real life situations. So now it is very essential for Malaysian nurses to demonstrate a good command in English. Therefore this study aims to test the performance of the nurses of medical centre UMP on Occupational English writing Test and to revise some samples based on the performance of the nurses in the writing test and interview.

III. METHODS

This study employs a case study involving all the nurses of the Medical Centre UMP [5]. The cases chosen are five nurses, an assistant medical officer and a health care assistant from the pusat kesihatan pelajar UMP. Medical centre UMP was established on August 2, 2004. To care the student patients, it has a medical unit which comprises of an Assistant Medical Officer, five staff nurses, an assistant pharmacy assistant, two drivers and three Health Care Assistants.

This study makes use of primary and secondary data. The source of primary data are the answers nurses gave mainly in the interview whereas the secondary data are obtained from related published journals and books. Before beginning of the interview, the interview questions are explained to the nurses. The study is conducted in English. The researcher analyses the raw data, qualitative data thematically and organises them based on common theme. She reduces the data into a manageable size which presents as much data as in the raw data [3].

IV. FINDINGS

An interview was conducted on 7th and 8th March, 2012 on 7 nurses of the medical centre UMP as it was vital to assure that the researcher was “in a position of being able to access the degree of the interviewee’s interest and involvement” (Robson, 2000: 90). It was also convenient for “its flexibility balanced by structure and the quality of the data so obtained” (Gillham 2005: 70). 7 samples were interviewed separately. The interviews together lasted approximately 15-20 minutes. All the interviews were conducted in English and were written with subject’s permission. Initially, the subjects were asked open-ended questions to establish a rapport with the samples. Later, a semi-structured question format was used as a guideline to ask questions and to inspire the interviewees to talk in their own way. The interviews comprised of a balance of open and close ended questions (see Appendix for interview questions.)

In response to the question number 1, 2 (What about the test?, Is the test difficult or easy?), Respondent 3 said it so difficult, two other respondents (Respondent 5 and 6) said that the test is difficult, Respondent 4 told that the test is easy and the rest three nurses (Respondent 1, 2 and 7) said that the test is middle, not so easy or difficult. The respondents who considered the test difficult gave the reason that it is not a part of their job and they are not familiar with the format of referral letter. The respondent telling the test easy actually don’t understand even the question (Her answer clearly showed it). The respondent who considered the test middle are

of the opinion that certain words are difficult for them because they use different words. Also to continue writing sentences is difficult because their command in grammar is not good enough.

In response to the question no 3 (If it is difficult, which part is difficult?), Respondent 4 did not answer because she did not understand the question. Other two respondents (Respondent 2 and 3) said that to make the short forms into sentences is difficult for them. The rest four nurses considered some definite parts difficult. For example, to respondent 6 the ‘Assessment’ part is difficult, to respondent 5 ‘Social Background’ part and also some terms such as FBE, UEC, Wheelie-walker, Ward, Mane seemed to be difficult. For respondent 1, ‘Discharge plan’ part seemed to be difficult and for respondent 7 the term Mane appeared incomprehensible.

In response to the question no 4 and 5 (What about the language? and Is it comprehensible or difficult to understand?), almost every respondent was of the opinion that the language of the test is comprehensible and easy except some terms but they do not know how to write that in a proper way. Most of the respondents answered either question no 4 or 5 not both.

In response to the question no 6 (If the test is difficult, which things should change to make it easier to understand?), respondent 1, 5, 6 and 7 referred some parts which should be changed into easier one. For example, respondent 1 said that Nursing Management and Progress part should change into easier. To respondent 5, difficult terms should be changed into easier one. Assessment part seemed to be difficult for the respondent 6 who opined that this part should change to make the test comprehensible. Respondent 7 was of the opinion that known words or terms which are used in Malaysia should be used to make the test easier. The rest 3 respondent (Respondent 2, 3 and 4) did not answer this question because they did not understand it.

In response to the question no 7 (Is there a problem in Malaysia when tourists who do not speak the native language are taken ill?), respondent 3, 4 and 5 said that the language barrier may result in misunderstanding between tourist patient and medical professionals. It can also cause poor medication or overtreatment by the physician. Respondent 6 did not answer to the point and respondent 2 did not answer because they did not understand the question. Respondent 1 opined that the tourist patient will not get the proper treatment because of the language barrier as they (Nurses) cannot take the accurate history. She also added that sometimes tourists thought them rude because of their pronunciation. Respondent 7 was also of the same opinion that certain part of English they cannot pronounce properly which creates miscommunication between medical professionals and the patients.

In response to the question no 8 (Is the Occupational English Test provided by OET Centre, Australia suitable to be used in Malaysian context?), all the nurses agreed (Except respondent 2 who did not answer) that Occupational English Test provided by OET Centre is suitable to be used in Malaysian context because in Malaysia there are many foreign people so to serve better, Malaysian nurses need a good command in job related English.

For the question no 9 (What are the problems that might occur if a patient cannot communicate with emergency or medical staff (a) on first contact, and (b) during treatment?), the respondents 2, 4 and 6 did not give any response. Respondent 5 said that if a patient cannot communicate with emergency or medical staff they do not get the correct treatment. The respondents 1, 3 and 7 did not answer directly. They try to give some solutions. For example respondent 1 and respondent 3 said that in emergency case they try to understand a patient's body language to understand his problem. Respondent 7 said that if a patient cannot communicate with emergency or medical staff, a medical interpreter's help can be taken.

In response to the question no 10 (If a language test were to be given to nurses in Malaysia wishing to work in another country, what constructs are to be tested, and what task types might be included on the test?), all the nurses emphasized that Malaysian nurses' communication skill in the working context, fluency, grammar and vocabulary should be tested if they have to work in another country. In addition, respondent 4 said that a nurse needs to know the culture of a country if she has to work in that country. Respondent 1 was of the opinion that a nurse's grammar needs not be tested.

For question no 11 (If a language test for medical interpreters is to be designed, what constructs would be used in the test, and what task types would be included on the test?), respondent 2 did not give any answer. Respondent 1, 5, 6 and 7 opined that a medical interpreter should be competent in every aspect of a language. Respondent 4 said that a medical interpreter must be good in both first (Bahasa Malayu) and second language (English). Respondent 3 was of the opinion that only communication skill and fluency of a medical interpreter should be tested.

For the last question also (Is the existing English Test in Malaysia, for example the IELTS useful for making decisions about ability to communicate in medical settings. Is the content relevant to this particular domain?), Respondent 2 did not give any answer. Respondent 6 said that she heard about IELTS first time and respondent 4 said that she has never heard about IELTS. Respondent 7 said that both OET and IELTS are useful for medical professionals. Respondent 1, 3 and 5 opined that OET is suitable for medical context and respondent 1 and 5 specified that only OET is suitable for medical setting, not IELTS.

From the responses of the respondents, it can be concluded that OET is suitable for the nurses and it is not so difficult for them as IELTS except some parts and some terms. If they practice, they can improve their command in job-related English and can do better in OET.

V. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The interview unfolds that nurses' communication failure may cause catastrophic result. So their Communicative competency needs to be assessed. OET is not so difficult for the nurses and is also relevant to their profession. The nurses understood what they had to do but because of poor grammar and vocabulary they faced difficulty to answer well. Most of the nurses on average opined that the test is not difficult. Most

of them used right referral letter format and wrote relevant case notes in their letter but in some cases they could not expand the notes in a grammatical way and also could not use appropriate vocabulary. So to perform the task, the nurses used both language knowledge and content knowledge which makes OET writing test a defining example of profession specific language test and reflects its suitability for the nurses.

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