

Research Article



An Empirical Study on Enhancing Linguistic Skills through English for Specific Purposes (ESP) Course for Pharmacy Students

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ABSTRACT

The concept of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) is extremely important as it is lays emphasis on the learner's need for learning. This paper is a study on the need for conducting linguistic need analysis for learners of ESP courses. The sample chosen for the study was 280 students belonging to the undergraduate pharmacy course. The researcher also ensured that the 280 students had similar demographic details. The sample was further grouped in two groups –140 students belonging to the Experimental group and 140 students belonging to the Control group. Before the course the linguistic need analysis test was conducted for both the group on the four linguistic skills (Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing). The pretest of the Experimental group was studied and the researcher tailored the syllabus, lesson plans and teaching methods/style to suit the needs of the learners of the Experimental group. The pretest results of the Control group were studied only after the post test was conducted. The researcher did not tailor the course to suit the learner's of the Control group. The findings of the study conclude that the learners of the Experimental group performed better in the post test administered to both the groups. The placement records also show that 67% of students of the Experimental group were employed and the remaining 33% opted for higher studies/marriage/business. Whereas only 32% of students of the Control group were employed and the remaining 31% wanted to be employed and 37% opted for higher studies/marriage/business.

Keywords: ESP course, linguistic skill, pharmacy, employability, specific needs.

INTRODUCTION

Clear communication is vital in a people-oriented field like medicine or pharmacy. It is extremely important to master English skills needed to communicate effectively with patients, customers and colleagues. To be employed in medicine or pharmacies requires an encyclopaedic knowledge of accurate terminology, as well as clear conversational skills. This can be achieved only by specific training with focus on the needs of the learners. It is evident that lack of linguistic skills leads to failure in effectively communication resulting in employability. As Pharmacists play an essential role when serving the health needs of the general public, language should never be a barrier. In today's world, pharmacists are often the first point of contact between patients and the medical profession, as authorities on drugs and their uses. The public approach the pharmacy to procure drugs. At times, the public may fail to go to the doctor for minor health issues. They choose to approach the pharmacist. Hence it is important to have a course to focus on the specific language skills and vocabulary needed by the learner. The course must provide the opportunity to focus on the skills needed to effectively and clearly communicate in English within pharmacy environments and to the outside world.

Review of Literature

The Origins of ESP: The three reasons common to the emergence of all ESP are: the demands of a Brave New World, a revolution in linguistics, and focus on the learner

(Hutchinson & Waters, 1987)¹. The end of the Second World War brought with it an " ... age of enormous and unprecedented expansion in scientific, technical and economic activity on an international scale · for various reasons, most notably the economic power of the United States in the post-war world, the role [of international language] fell to English". The Oil Crisis of the early 1970s resulted in Western money and knowledge flowing into the oil-rich countries Hutchinson and Waters (1987)². The language of this knowledge became English. The general effect of all this development was to exert pressure on the language teaching profession to deliver the required goods. Whereas English had previously decided its own destiny, it now became subject to the wishes, needs and demands of people other than language teachers (Hutchinson & Waters)³. Language varies in different situations hence tailoring language instruction to meet the needs of learners in specific contexts is also possible and important.

Defining the Teacher's role: Dudley Evans and St. John (1998)⁴ identify five key roles for the ESP practitioner: Teacher, course designer and materials provider, collaborator, researcher, evaluator. Based on David Nunan's⁵ observations about the teacher as a curriculum developer. It seems fairly obvious that if teachers are to be the ones responsible for developing the curriculum, they need the time, the skills and the support to do so. Support may include curriculum models and guidelines and may include support from individuals acting in a curriculum advisory position.



ESP and Psychology: The final reason Hutchinson and Waters (1987)⁶ cite as having influenced the emergence of ESP has less to do with linguistics and everything to do with psychology. Rather than simply focus on the method of language delivery, more attention was given to the ways in which learners acquire language and the differences in the ways language is acquired. Learners were seen to employ different learning strategies, use different skills, enter with different learning schemata, and be motivated by different needs and interests. Therefore, focus on the learners' needs became equally paramount as the methods employed to disseminate linguistic knowledge. Designing specific courses to better meet these individual needs was a natural extension of this thinking.

Abilities Required for Successful Communication in Occupational Settings: Cummins (1979)⁷ theorized a dichotomy between basic interpersonal communication skills (BICS) and cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP). The former refers to the language skills used in the everyday informal language used with friends, family and co-workers. The latter refers to a language proficiency required to make sense of and use academic language. Situations in which individuals use BICS are characterized by contexts that provide relatively easy access to meaning. However, CALP use occurs in contexts that offer fewer contextual clues.

Material Development: This is the most crucial step in designing an ESP course. Materials are chosen to suit the learner's needs. The materials are usually authentic materials chosen from the professional field. This is to give an experience of the kind of language/terms used in the chosen field.

Linguistic skills: A skill refers to the ability to do something well (Hornby 1995)⁸. In the context of language teaching, a skill refers to one's language performance (Brown, 2001)⁹. One's language performance is divided into two forms, namely productive performance and receptive performance. In English, productive performances include speaking and writing skills while receptive performances include listening and reading skills.

Objectives of the study

The objective of this study is to improve students' linguistic skills through ESP course. In more specific terms, this study is aimed at answering the questions of

Do learners have specific linguistic needs?

Do learners improve their linguistic abilities through ESP courses?

If so, what are the professional benefits?

Methodology

Population and Sampling: The population for the study consisted of pre final year students studying B. Pharm in

SRM University, India in the year 2014-2015. The sample was drawn by convenience sampling method. It was ensured that the sample was adequately representative of the characteristics of the population. The sample size was 70. The respondents were of both the genders. All the students chosen for the study had their education in schools where the medium of language was English at higher secondary level. Out of the sample, 20 students were in the control group and 50 students were in the experimental group. The Control group had 8 girls and 12 boys. The Experimental group had 20 girls and 30 boys.

Questionnaire: The questionnaire had two parts. Section A focused on demographic details. Section B dealt with simple questions pertaining to the linguistic skills – Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing. The questionnaire variables were measured using 5 point Likert scale. To check the reliability of scale, cornbach's alpha reliability co-efficient was used. The value being 0.778, scale is more consistent and highly reliable. The section B in the questionnaire enabled the researchers to draw inferences on the level of attainment/requirement of each skill. Students were tested in the four linguistic skills with special focus on ten sub skills of each skill.

Listening: Understand while listening, can separate messages, attention to tone, intonation and pause, predict context/situation, recognize grammar distinctions, listen even if the vocabulary is high, listen for global comprehension, recognize the differences between similar words and phrases, listen for specific information, remember most of what you listened.

Speaking: Give suggestions/advise, speak clearly and accurately, think about the audience before speaking, can speak without preparation in front of audience, able to convey major and supporting ideas, ask questions for clarification, rate how well you spoke, able to give short talks, able to make oral presentations effectively, think about the topic to brainstorm words/phrases before speaking.

Reading: Remember the main ideas of the text, read even if vocabulary is high, connect reading to prior knowledge, listeners can understand your reading, read with understanding, able to read to suit the audience, use contextual clues to establish the meaning of a word while reading, read to compare and contrast ideas in the given text, interpret the author's intention while reading, read with empathy when required.

Writing: Enjoy writing, write without digressions or redundancies, demonstrate a command of standard written English, generate ideas while writing, write using appropriate language terms, use good standard grammar, write to suit the audience, can take notes effectively, can write on various communicative functions, able to edit your writing.

Data Collection: The Experimental group was given a course on ESP (English for Specific Purposes) whereas the Control group was given the usual regular English course.



Both the groups were given a pre test before the course and a post test after the course. The tests were designed to test the learner's level in each skill. The skills were tested for 25 marks each and the marks were converted to 100. The pre test result of the Experimental group was analyzed and the course was designed according to the needs of the learner. The pre and post test results of the Control group were analyzed only at the end of the course. The researcher met with subject experts, professionals of the field, and subject teachers of the sample group to draw necessary information to make the course successful.

Course Design: The Control group was not given the ESP course. The ESP course was designed only for the Experimental group. The course covered the following skills with special emphasis on enhancing linguistic needs of the learners. The medical and pharmacy vocabulary, pronunciation, listening comprehension, pharmacist – patient dialogues, idiomatic language, prescription writing, reporting to colleagues/clients, solutions to complex industry issues, introducing self, functions within the industry, language for meetings and negotiations, identify the constituent parts of the business, discuss the growth of the industry in the developing world, awareness of challenges to the industry and the image it has in the outside world, understand the impact of the 'Direct to Pharmacy' supply chain model on parallel trade, reflect on the trend towards biotechnology products, know the significance and regulation of internet trading in pharmaceutical products, awareness on the changing role of governments and how to achieve a balance between price and innovation, discuss standard operational practice and suggesting corrective action, ask/give opinions, describe a process and give/request for information, make suggestions in a meeting and respond to questions, report adverse events, ask about implications, give advice, fluency development, email culture, building listening skills, develop the language needed in the context of drug discovery and drug development, define the challenges, risk and cost of innovation within the industry, practice the English needed to discuss good pharmaceutical practice including quality assurance controls, regulatory documentation and audit mechanisms, build language to discuss issues around applying for drug patents and patent protection, use English to discuss pre-clinical and clinical trials and testing, developing vocabulary to discuss mergers, acquisitions and co marketing of drugs and the controversies behind marketing and lobbying of drugs in general, improving business English language skills while

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

VI Findings and Suggestions

The results of the study indicate: Students perform better when their specific linguistic needs are met. The course on ESP has enabled more students to be employed. The course on ESP has enabled teacher to focus on needs of the learner creating opportunities of

talking about relevant, challenging topics in professional area, benchmark knowledge with other professionals in the Pharmaceutical industry, discuss relevant, challenging case studies, develop language skills in your profession which could be key to career progression, present research findings and give presentations confidently and effectively, broaden range of vocabulary to describe chemical, biological terms and procedures, improve reading, writing, speaking and listening skills through studying technical presentations.

Teaching Methods: The researchers taught both the groups for duration of 30 hours per semester. In total it was 60 hours for one academic year. The Experimental group was taught with special attention to the needs of the learners. The researcher studied the pre test result of the Experimental. The findings revealed: Need to improve Listening skill: 5 students, Need to improve Speaking skill: 21students, Need to improve Reading skill: 15 students, Need to improve Writing skill: 9 students. During the training sessions the teacher made sure that all the four skills were taught as per the requirement of the students of the Experimental group along with the regular course. However, the teacher focused more on training students on speaking and reading skill as many students from the Experimental group expressed their need to improve speaking and reading skills. The Control group was taught the regular course with no special training on specific needs. The researcher did not analyze the requirements/needs of the learner. Students were given to study a lot about medicines. They also learnt about basic illnesses and over the counter medicines available at pharmacies and drugstores. The teacher observed the students and gave constructive feedback. The students were given a lot of practice because the ability to communicate in a second language clearly and efficiently contributes to the success of the learner in school/college and success later in every phase of life. Rather than leading students to pure memorization, they were provided with a rich environment with opportunities to improve linguistic skills. With this aim, various activities were given. The integration of the four skill through activities in the language classroom served many valuable purposes: they gave learners scaffold support, opportunities to create, contexts in which to use the language for exchanges of real information, evidence of their own ability (proof of learning) and, most important, confidence. The students of the Experimental group were given formative tests and activities to enhance their specific needs along with constructive feedback.

enhancing professional sustenance. The course has enabled learners to improve their linguistic abilities. Teachers' must teach to cater to students specific needs. There is a lack of emphasis on linguistic skills in the curriculum. Teachers should employ the best to provide methods to provide timely constructive feedback. Examination system should integrate assessment of



linguistic skills. Teachers must be involved in curriculum planning.

Table 1: Listening Skill for Control Group and Experimental Group - Group Frequency Of Students' Scores In % - Pre And Post Test

S. No	Category for Listening skill	Class Scores	% of learners - Control group -PRE TEST –(C)	% of learners - Control group – POST TEST –(D)	% of learners Experimental group – PRE TEST –(E)	% of learners Experimental group –POST TEST –(F)
1	Excellent	Above 90	8%	9%	6%	14%
2	Very good	80 to 90	16%	19%	16%	27%
3	Good	70 to 80	20%	28%	10%	30%
4	Fair	60 to 70	24%	24%	29%	18%
5	Needs Improvement	50 to 60	20%	13%	35%	11%
6	Below Average	Below 50	12%	7%	4%	0%

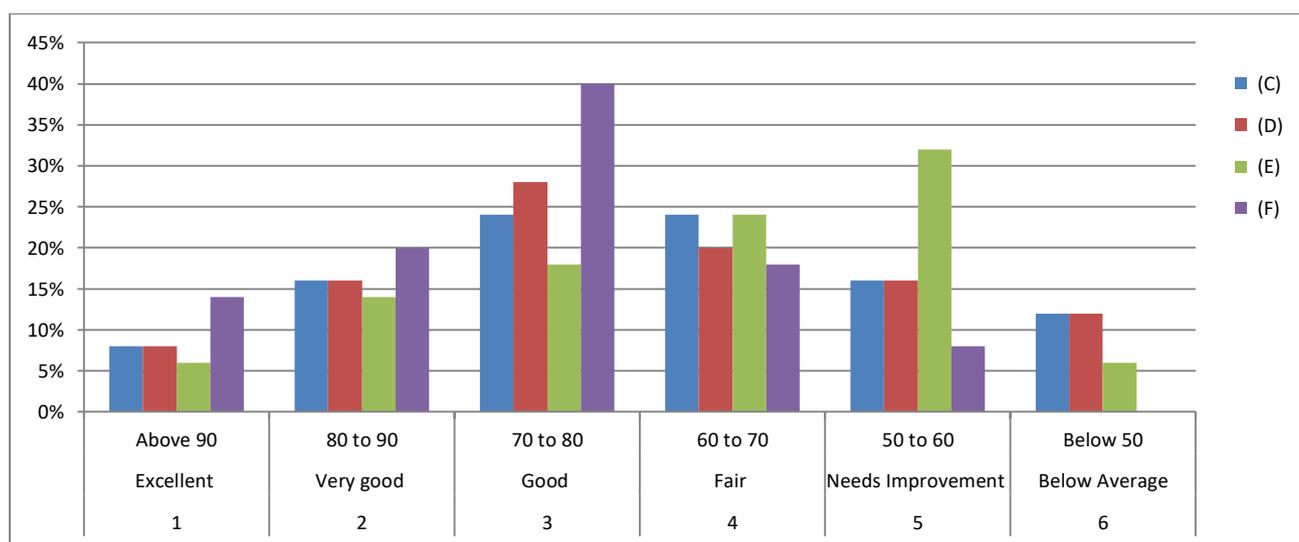


Table 2: Speaking Skill for Control Group and Experimental Group - Group Frequency Of Students' Scores In % - Pre and Post Test

S. No	Category for Speaking skill	Class Scores	% of learners- Control group –PRE TEST (C)	% of learners- Control group – POST TEST –(D)	% of learners Experimental group –PRE TEST – (E)	% of learners Experimental group –POST TEST –(F)
1	Excellent	Above 90	8%	8%	6%	14%
2	Very good	80 to 90	16%	16%	14%	20%
3	Good	70 to 80	24%	28%	18%	40%
4	Fair	60 to 70	24%	20%	24%	18%
5	Needs Improvement	50 to 60	16%	16%	32%	8%
6	Below Average	Below 50	12%	12%	6%	0%

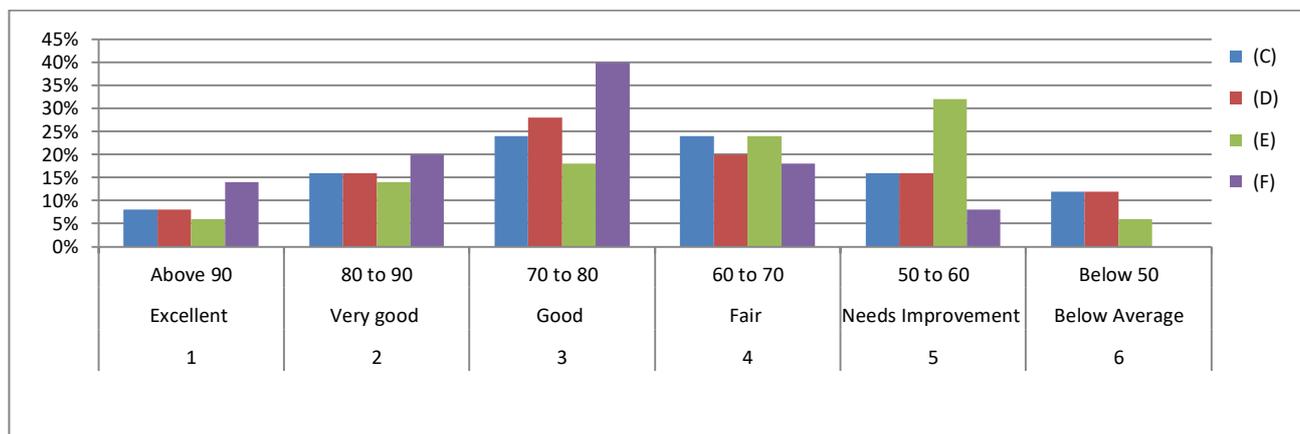


Table 3: Reading Skill Control Group and Experimental Group - Group Frequency of Students' Scores In % - Pre And Post Test

S. No	Category for Reading skill	Class Scores	% of learners- Control group –PRE TEST –(C)	% of learners- Control group – POST TEST –(D)	% of learners- Experimental group –PRE TEST –(E)	% of learners- Experimental group –POST TEST –(F)
1	Excellent	Above 90	8%	8%	6%	14%
2	Very good	80 to 90	16%	16%	14%	20%
3	Good	70 to 80	24%	28%	18%	40%
4	Fair	60 to 70	24%	20%	24%	18%
5	Needs Improvement	50 to 60	16%	16%	32%	8%
6	Below Average	Below 50	12%	12%	6%	0%

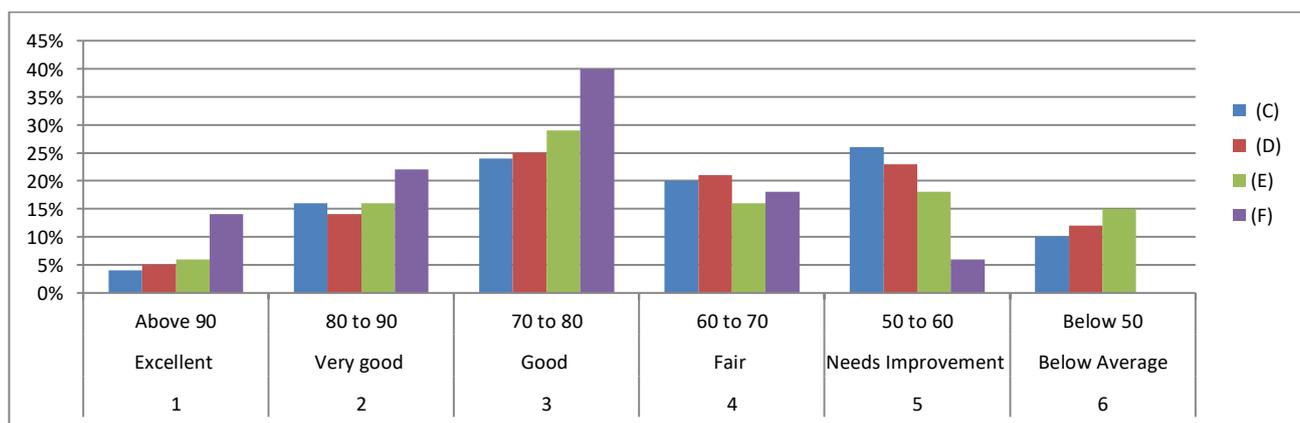


Table 4: Writing Skill Control Group and Experimental Group - Group Frequency of Students' Scores in % - Pre and Post Test

S. No	Category for Writing skill	Class Scores	% of learners - Control group –PRE TEST –(C)	% of learners - Control group – POST TEST –(D)	% of learners- Experimental group –PRE TEST –(E)	% of learners - Experimental group –POST TEST –(F)
1	Excellent	Above 90	4%	5%	6%	14%
2	Very good	80 to 90	16%	14%	16%	22%
3	Good	70 to 80	24%	25%	29%	40%
4	Fair	60 to 70	20%	21%	16%	18%
5	Needs Improvement	50 to 60	26%	23%	18%	6%
6	Below Average	Below 50	10%	12%	15%	0%

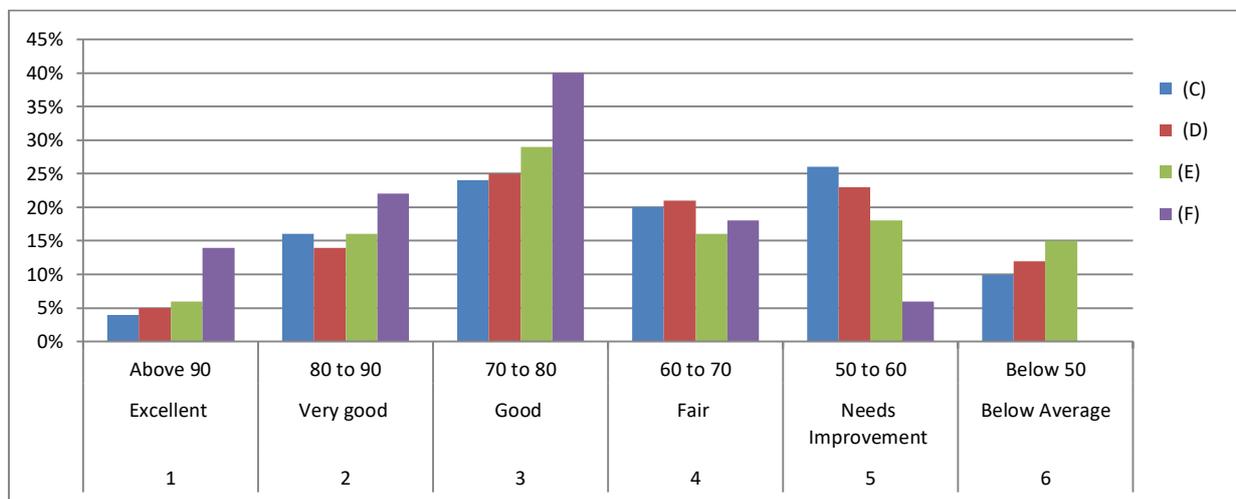
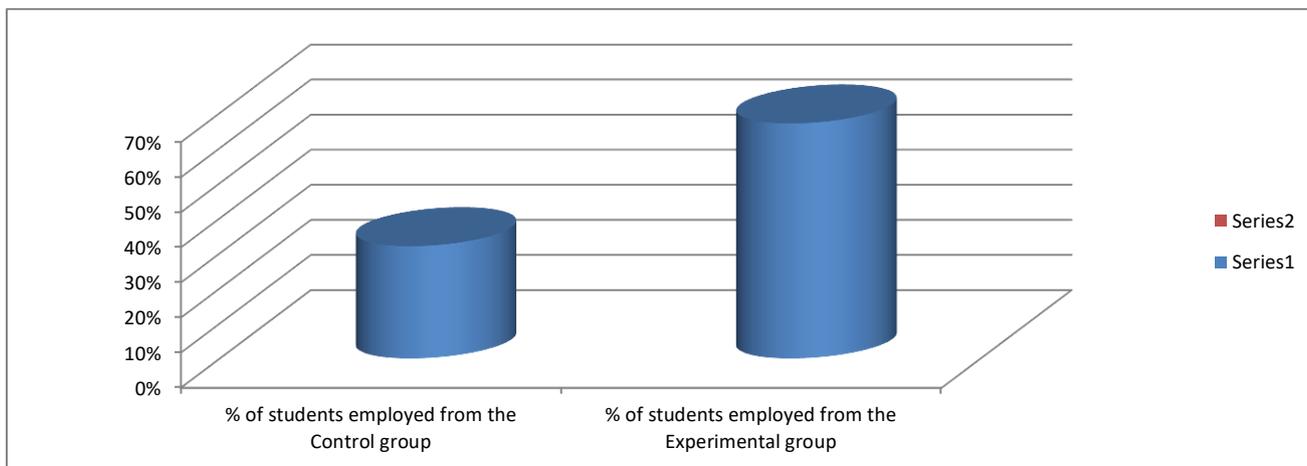


Table 5: Comparison of Students from Control and Experimental Group - Employed % Wise

S. No.	% employed from the Control group	% employed from the Experimental group
1	32% - SERIES 1	67% - SERIES 2



Students must be tested in linguistic proficiency before admitting them in professional courses. Students must be trained and the linguistic void must be removed through specific training. Linguistic proficiency enables students to perform and sustain on their jobs.

CONCLUSION

Many people believe that English is enough to get by everywhere and in any situation. Teresa Tinsley, leader of the 1000 Words Challenge campaign. She says: "There are cases of [language skills] being used as a tie-breaker between two equally well-qualified candidates. Most employers think that maybe they will get something extra from someone with a better knowledge of English language.

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