



## RESEARCH ARTICLE

### NEEDS ASSESSMENT SURVEY OF LANGUAGE TEACHERS DEVELOPING PROFESSIONAL SKILLS

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#### ABSTRACT

It is highly significant that the skills of the teachers in this globalised and standardized world should be updated up to the expectations of their wards/students in the classroom. As this profession seemed to be highly challenging and risky where the participants are technology driven, language teachers working in schools should be highly proficient and competent as for as communicable English is concerned. Mushroom growth of technological devices has paved the way for vast knowledge enrichment by the learner community. Even though teachers are qualified as per the norms prescribed, they have to have excellent proficiency in terms of vocabulary, grammatical structures, and so on. Studies on students of various disciplines regarding skills deficiencies, needs analysis, etc. have been carried on by researchers. But very less number of studies conducted on identification of language needs of the prospective teachers (B.Ed./M.Ed.) students which is the need of the hour. They are training in the methodology of teaching like micro-teaching, macro-teaching, evaluation measures, etc whereas the communication needs of these students are highly neglected area as for as research studies are concerned. Hence, this study attempts to identify the language needs of the teachers working in the schools of Tiruvannamalai District, Tamilnadu.

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#### INTRODUCTION

Communication skills are found highly important for many professionals but crucial for teachers. Teachers communicate with students, parents, colleagues and administrators every day. Whether communicated face-to-face, on the phone, in print, electronically or through the public address system, the message must be constructed carefully and delivered clearly to be properly received. Good handwriting, spelling and grammar are very important in all forms of written communication. Communication is central to the teaching process. Some even argue that communication is the teaching process. As Hurt, Scott and McCroskey (1978) have stated it that, there is "a difference between knowing and teaching, and that difference is communication in the classroom". It leads to the development of listening, speaking, reading, and writing skill. Teachers should be highly qualified in all these areas to excel in their profession. Experienced communicators receive information to understand and synthesize it and to express them at a higher level. They make excellent teachers because they are able to transmit knowledge, skills and values at the same time they communicate their care for the students entrusted to their care. They help to motivate students to learn.

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Although training is often given in isolation of a classroom without the presence of other adults, good teaching includes consultation with colleagues. Schools see themselves as professional learning communities encourage teachers to plan lessons together and learn from each other. They take a team approach to solving problems, especially for difficult students. This requires excellent communication. Teachers remain abreast of new trends in education by reading magazines, listening to new ideas from their administrators and school board consultants, and share and discuss these ideas with colleagues. The tasks for the teachers in the school premises are getting more challenging these days as a result of increased competition for the communication skills. The student teachers at Education colleges in our country are academically trained in the micro-teaching & macro-teaching techniques, methods to effectively transmit the knowledge, usage of teaching learning materials, adopting the latest strategies in the classrooms, etc. Amidst all, there comes an issue of poor communication skills, not specific while teaching and learning, and explanations are not brief. In such a context, there is a felt need to identify the needs of English language in reading, listening, speaking, and writing for the student teachers from selected Education colleges in Tiruvannamalai District. This identification indeed helps the teacher educators to efficiently train the communicative competencies of the student teachers along with microteaching and others.

The main purpose of this study is to identify the English language needs of the student teachers (prospective teachers) from the selected Education colleges in Tiruvannamalai District. It aims to identify the prospective teachers' perception of their language needs in reading, listening, speaking, and writing. It further examines the respondents' rating of their own competence in all the mentioned skills related to academic studies and their future profession.

### Literature Review

This literature review outlines the studies on English language needs of students of various disciplines and domains. Rattanapinyowong *et al.* (1988) investigated the English language academic needs of healthcare students at Mahidol University, Bangkok. Questionnaires were administered to 351 students of nursing and related fields. In addition, interviews were conducted with teachers in a number of departments of the university. The data collected were analyzed in order to identify the English language needs of the students. The study concluded that fewer academic needs were expressed than expected. Both the students and teachers stressed the need for English courses designed for specific healthcare professions.

Alagozlu (1994) investigated the English language needs of students at the Faculty of Medicine in Cumhuriyet University, Turkey. He interrogated three different sources, viz. students, teachers and administrators, by means of two data collection methods: questionnaire and interview. The results indicated that reading and translation were the language skills most needed by the students. Significant differences were also found among the perceptions of students, teachers and administrators regarding students' needs. In addition, it was found that most of the informants were dissatisfied, to some extent, with the current English language curriculum and that it did not fulfill the needs of the students.

Chia *et al.* (1999) tried to identify and describe the perceptions of medical college students and faculty members regarding the English language needs of the students. The setting of their NA study was Chung Shan Medical College in Taichung, Taiwan. Using the questionnaire technique, they sampled 349 medical students and 20 faculty members. The study focused on investigating the importance of English language use in students' studies and their target careers, as well as the basic English skills needed in a first-year English course. It was found that English language was perceived as important for students' academic studies and their future work. Besides, students expressed the need for a basic English language course at the first-year level, naming listening as the most important skill to improve. Both the students and staff also considered more than one year of English language study to be desirable.

According to the findings of needs analysis in other countries, there have been many studies conducted in many places at different conditions. The similarity of these studies is that they use needs analysis to investigate the exact needs of the target group in order to achieve the maximum goal. It can be concluded that various groups of studies require different language skills based on the purpose of each group or occupation. Needs analysis can be identified as the first step in any planning or design process and used as the way to gather the desired result which is an actual need. Finally, an appropriate solution will be targeted to each group.

Thus, literature reveals that systematic needs analysis are necessary in order to study the skills which are required for a group of learners through different data collection instruments from different sources. The results of such studies lead to useful decisions regarding the improvement of basic curricular elements. In order to identify the required language skills for the prospective teachers (B.Ed. Students) of Tiruvannamalai District, the researcher has used a needs analysis questionnaire in two ways.

### METHODOLOGY

The research setting refers to the place where the data are collected. In this study, the responses are collected from the prospective teachers of selected B.Ed. colleges of Tiruvannamalai District. The numbers of B.Ed. colleges in this district are found extensively enormous. The researcher is unable to survey the responses of all these colleges as the size of the target population is just huge. Therefore, the samples are randomly selected from the target population. The participants are taken from the selected B.Ed., colleges of Tiruvannamalai District. There are 34 B.Ed. colleges functioning in the district and the responses are collected from the selected colleges among them. The participants are B.Ed. students from the educational colleges and from various departments (Tamil, English, Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry, History, Commerce, Economics, Computer Science, Biology, Botany, etc) as well. After the completion of B.Ed. they will be professionally qualified and recognized for teaching profession where they are expected to perform various tasks in English effectively. Hence, it is felt essential to work on the English language needs of these prospective teachers. They are advised to read the instructions carefully before responding to the items given in the questionnaire and they are informed that their responses will be kept confidential as well.

In order to identify the language needs of the prospective teachers, a research questionnaire is constructed. The research questionnaire is framed by taking the items used by Habtamu Desta (2008) in his study on 'English Language Needs Analysis of Fine Art Students at Mekelle College of Teacher Education'. Few more items are added into the questionnaire and it is standardised through a pilot study. The questionnaire is divided into two parts. Part-I consists of questions seeking the personal details of the participants starting from age, sex, place of living, qualification, marital status and their optional subject of study. Part-II is based on questions testing the language needs of the prospective teachers in two major domains: Academic Studies and Future Profession. The aim of this questionnaire is to elicit information on prospective teachers' perception of their language needs, their current language abilities and competencies related to academic purpose as well as future profession.

The researcher has individually met the student teachers of selected B.Ed., colleges from Tiruvannamalai District and explained the purpose of the contents of the questionnaire. He has approached the officials of 25 educational institutions to collect the responses from their student teachers. Out of which 15 have permitted the researcher to meet their students and collect the responses. The contents of the questionnaire are clearly explained to all the students irrespective of their optional papers and the participants are requested not to leave any item unanswered. The options for the items are: very important, important, moderately, not important, and totally

unimportant. The widely used Likert 5-point scale is used to analyse the responses with the option 'very important' carrying 5 and 'totally unimportant' carries 1. The responses are collected from the participants with fewer difficulties. In order to identify the English language needs of the prospective teachers, the descriptive statistics has been used in this study. Frequency analysis is a descriptive statistical method that shows the number of occurrences of each response chosen by the respondents. When using frequency analysis, SPSS Statistics can also calculate the mean, median and mode to help users analyse the results and draw conclusions. In this study, frequency helps to understand the number of occurrences of each response chosen by the student teachers selected from the Education colleges in Tiruvannamalai District.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The main objective of the study is to identify the language needs of the student teachers (prospective teachers) of Tiruvannamalai District. So, a survey is initiated to collect the required data. Significant sub skills of reading, listening, speaking, and writing skills are identified after due Statistical analysis. These sub skills are essential for the respondents' academic studies as well as future profession. Frequency analysis has been applied in this study to find out the essential sub skills for the target audience. The number of sub skills emerged out of this study are found enormous, the sub skills which are with 60% and above percentage are considered as most essential. Hence, they are extracted as important sub skills for successful completion of their course and effective workplace functionality as well.

### Recommendation

The findings of the study reveals that the following competencies are found highly significant for the academic purpose of the prospective teachers: Reading newspapers, reading academic texts, reading reference materials, reading college/university prospectus, listening to course lectures, listening to seminars, listening at meetings, listening to presentations, listening to class discussions, listening news channels, speaking in class discussions, speaking with lecturers, speaking at seminars, writing letters, writing plays, writing course assignments, writing notes, writing exam papers, and writing e-mail messages. It is also found that the following competencies are found highly essential for the future profession of the prospective teachers: Reading newspapers, reading comics, reading short stories, speaking at seminars, speaking at meetings, writing reports, and writing plays.

The identified essential competencies for the student teachers are ranked in terms of their significance for their academic studies and future profession. This arrangement of essential competencies is found essential for the student teachers from the selected Education colleges of Tiruvannamalai District. These competencies can be used for purposes of framing the suitable curriculum for the student teachers in order to excel in their profession. It can be used to identify the skill gaps in communication skills for effective functioning in the workplace of the student teachers and necessary remedial measures in the form skilling can be decided upon. Special communication skills modules can be designed by taking the findings of the study especially for these student teachers in the form of interviews and test.

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