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A Needs Analysis of Nursing Students' English Proficiency, Learning Goals, and Content Preferences in English for Nursing Courses

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ABSTRACT
Needs analysis plays a crucial role in designing effective English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses, particularly in nursing education, where language skills are essential for professional communication. This study aimed to analyze nursing students' English proficiency, learning goals, and content preferences to provide insights for the development of English for Nursing courses. Employing a descriptive quantitative design, data were collected through a questionnaire administered to a total sample of 33 nursing students of the sixth semester at Poltekkes Kemenkes Semarang. The findings revealed that most students were interested in learning English and perceived it as important for their future careers. In terms of English proficiency, reading was identified as the strongest skill, while speaking was the weakest. The primary goals for learning English were to support future careers, communicate with foreigners, and understand academic texts and journal articles. Regarding content preferences, students considered nursing-related topics such as patient admission, patient education, standard operating procedures, checking vital signs, and reporting health problems as highly important. These findings suggest that English for Nursing courses should place greater emphasis on developing speaking skills and integrating authentic nursing-related materials that reflect real clinical situations. The study highlights the importance of conducting needs analysis to ensure that English instruction is relevant to students' academic and professional needs.

Keywords: English for Specific Purposes (ESP); needs analysis; nursing students

INTRODUCTION
In today's globalized healthcare environment, English plays a crucial role in professional communication, academic advancement, and cross-border collaboration. Nurses are increasingly required to interact with international patients, access medical literature written in English, and participate in global professional development program (Nashir et al., 2022). Effective English communication skills are therefore essential not only for academic success but also for clinical performance and patient safety. In many non-English-speaking countries, nursing graduates are also expected to meet international standards of communication to compete in global healthcare markets.

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Within this context, English instruction for nursing students should go beyond general language proficiency and focus on discipline-specific communication. This aligns with the principles of English for Specific Purposes (ESP), which emphasizes that language instruction must be tailored to learners' professional and academic needs (Nashir et al., 2022). According to Hutchinson & Waters (Hutchinson & Waters, 2010), ESP is an approach to language teaching in which all decisions regarding content and method are based on learners' reasons for learning. Similarly, Dudley-Evans et al. (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998) highlight that ESP courses are designed to meet the specific needs of learners and are centered on the language appropriate to particular disciplines, occupations, and activities. In the context of nursing education, this means that English courses should incorporate authentic clinical communication, medical terminology, patient interaction, and documentation skills.

A fundamental component of ESP course design is needs analysis. Needs analysis serves as the foundation for identifying learners' target needs (what they need to do in the target situation) and learning needs (what they need to do in order to learn). As emphasized by Brown (Brown, 2007), systematic needs assessment enables educators to make informed decisions about curriculum content, materials development, and instructional strategies. Without conducting a needs analysis, English courses risk being overly general and misaligned with students' professional demands. In nursing programs, where communicative competence may directly affect patient care, the alignment between course content and professional needs becomes particularly crucial.

Despite the recognized importance of needs analysis in ESP, English courses in many nursing programs remain largely based on general English materials (Handayani, 2023; Nata, 2025; Octavia & Ratmanida, 2023). Several studies have examined the role of needs analysis in designing English for Nursing courses. For example, Nata (Nata, 2025) conducted a needs analysis to develop ESP materials for nursing students. The study found that nursing students required English instruction that focused on practical communication skills, medical vocabulary, and professional interactions in clinical settings. The findings suggested that ESP-based materials could better support students' preparation for professional practice. Similarly, Nashir et al. (Nashir et al., 2022) investigated nursing students' English language needs in order to design appropriate instructional materials. The study revealed that students considered speaking and communication with patients as the most important skills to develop. The researchers emphasized that ESP courses should prioritize real-life communication tasks relevant to nursing activities. Another study by Setiyani et al., (Setiyani et al., 2023) explored nursing students' perceptions of ESP courses and their language learning needs. The results indicated that students expected English instruction to help them improve both academic and professional communication skills. The study also highlighted the importance of integrating nursing-reelated topics and authentic learning materials in ESP classrooms.

Previous studies in ESP contexts have often focused on isolated aspects of learners' needs, such as target situation analysis or specific language skills. However, limited research has comprehensively examined nursing students' self-reported English proficiency across the four skills, their learning goals, and their preferred content topics simultaneously within a single study. Furthermore, contextual differences across institutions and countries necessitate localized needs analyses to ensure that course design reflects the actual conditions and expectations faced by students. Therefore, a systematic investigation of nursing students' English proficiency, learning goals, and content preferences is necessary to inform the development of relevant and effective English for Nursing courses. By identifying students' strengths and weaknesses across language skills, understanding their motivations and future professional aspirations, and determining the topics they perceive as important, educators can design more targeted and meaningful instructional materials. Accordingly, this study aims to

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analyze nursing students' English proficiency, learning goals, and content preferences in order to provide empirical data for the development of English for Nursing courses.

METHOD

This study employs a descriptive quantitative research design to analyze nursing students' English language needs. A quantitative approach is considered appropriate because it allows the researcher to collect and analyze numerical data from a relatively large number of participants through structured instruments. The participants of this study were nursing students of the sixth semester at Poltekkes Kemenkes. The participants were selected using a total sampling, and a total of 33 nursing students of the sixth semester became the subjects of this study. The primary instrument used in this study is a structured questionnaire designed to collect information about students' English learning needs. The questionnaire is adapted from previous studies on needs analysis in English for Specific Purposes (Nashir et al., 2022) and modified to suit the context of nursing education. The data were collected through the distribution of questionnaires to nursing students. The questionnaire was administered in online form (using Google Forms) during class sessions. The data obtained from the questionnaire were analyzed using descriptive statistical methods. The analysis includes calculating frequencies and percentages for each questionnaire item.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

The first part of the questionnaire explored students' interest in learning English. The results show that nursing students generally have a positive attitude toward English learning. Of the 33 respondents, 16 students (48.5%) reported being interested in learning English, while 11 students (33.3%) indicated that they were very interested. Six students (18.2%) selected the neutral option, and none of the respondents reported being uninterested in learning English. The result can be seen from Table 1 below.

Table 1. Students' Interest in Learning English

No	Interest Level	Number of students	Percentage
1	Very Interested	11	33,3%
2	Interested	16	48,5 %
3	Neutral	6	18,2%
4	Not interested	0	0
	TOTAL	33	100%

The findings indicate that more than four-fifths (81.8%) of the students demonstrate positive interest in learning English. This suggests that nursing students recognize the importance of English in their academic and professional development.

The second section of the questionnaire examined students' self-reported English proficiency in listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Students' English Proficiency

No	Language Skill	Very good	Good	Fair	Poor
1	Listening	0	14 (42,4%)	19 (57,6%)	0
2	Speaking	0	10 (30,3%)	20 (60,6%)	3 (9,1%)
3	Reading	2 (6,1%)	18 (54,5%)	13 (39,4%)	0
4	Writing	0	14 (42,4%)	16 (48,5%)	3 (9,1%)

The findings reveal that reading is the strongest language skill among the respondents, with 54.5% reporting a good level and 6.1% reporting a very good level. In contrast, speaking

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appears to be the weakest skill, as 60.6% of students rated themselves at a fair level and 9.1% reported poor proficiency. Listening and writing were also predominantly rated as fair, with 57.6% and 48.5% respectively.

The questionnaire also investigated students' goals for learning English. The results are summarized in Table 3.

Table 3. Students' Goals in Learning English

No.	Goal	No. of students	Percentage
1	To communicate with friends and foreigners	26	78,8%
2	To visit other countries/travelling	26	78,8%
3	To work overseas	21	63,6%
4	To support my career	28	84,8%
5	To continue study	18	54,5%
6	To understand reading text and journal articles	23	69,7%
7	Others	2	6,1%

The results indicate that the most common reason for learning English is to support future careers (84.8%). Other prominent goals include communicating with foreigners (78.8%), traveling abroad (78.8%), and understanding English texts and journal articles (69.7%). One student said that English is an international language that can be used in all countries and in any situation, therefore, students need to learn English. Another student claimed that she/he learned English to understand English content on social media. These findings suggest that students view English as an important tool for both professional and personal development.

The final section examined students' preferences regarding topics to be included in English for Nursing courses. The results are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Preferred Topics for English for Nursing Courses

No	Topic	Very Important	Important	Less Important	Not Important
1	Patients' Admission	23 (69,7%)	10 (30,3%)	0	0
2	Talking about Pain & Symptoms	21 (63,6%)	11 (33,3%)	1 (3%)	0
3	Giving Instruction and Advice	17 (51,5%)	16 (48,5)	0	0
4	Checking Vital Signs	22 (66,7%)	11 (33,3%)	0	0
5	Reporting Health Problems	22 (66,7%)	10 (30,3%)	1 (3%)	0
6	Mobilizing Patients	18 (54,5%)	15 (45,5%)	0	0
7	Administering Medication	20 (60,6%)	13 (39,4%)	0	0
8	Educating Patients	23 (69,7%)	10 (30,3%)	0	0
9	Patients' Personal Hygiene	21 (63,6%)	9 (27,3%)	3 (9,1%)	0
10	Standard Operating Procedure in Nursing	23 (69,7%)	9 (27,3%)	1 (3%)	0

The findings show that all nursing-related topics were perceived as important by the respondents. The highest-rated topics were Patients' Admission, Educating Patients, and Standard Operating Procedures in Nursing, each receiving a "Very Important" rating from 69.7% of respondents.

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Discussion

Nursing Students' English Proficiency

The results reveal that students generally perceive themselves as having moderate English proficiency, with most respondents selecting the "fair" and "good" categories across all four language skills. Reading emerged as the strongest skill, whereas speaking was identified as the weakest.

The nature of English instruction may explain the finding that reading is the strongest skill in many Indonesian educational contexts, where reading activities often receive greater emphasis than productive language skills. Students are frequently exposed to textbooks, journal articles, and written examinations, which contribute to the development of reading comprehension. Furthermore, nursing students are regularly required to read academic materials, including textbooks, research articles, and clinical guidelines. Such exposure may explain why 60.6% of respondents rated their reading ability as good or very good. This result supports the findings of Setiyani et al. (Setiyani et al., 2023) who reported that nursing students demonstrated stronger performance in reading-related tasks than in oral communication tasks. Similarly, Wulandari et al. (Wulandari et al., 2019) found that reading was among the most developed language skills among nursing students due to its frequent use in academic activities.

In contrast, speaking was identified as the weakest skill, with 60.6% of students rating themselves as fair and 9.1% as poor. This finding is not surprising because speaking requires spontaneous language production and real-time interaction, which many EFL learners have limited opportunities to practice. The weakness in speaking proficiency may also reflect limited exposure to authentic communicative situations. Although students may possess adequate grammatical and vocabulary knowledge, they often lack confidence when using English orally. Anxiety, fear of making mistakes, and limited classroom speaking opportunities may further contribute to this challenge. This finding aligns with the study by Nashir et al. (Nashir et al., 2022) which identified speaking as the most challenging skill among nursing students. Likewise, Pramusita et al. (Pramusita et al., 2024)found that nursing students experienced difficulties in oral communication despite recognizing its importance for their future profession.

From an ESP perspective, this finding is particularly significant because effective nurse-patient communication requires strong speaking skills. Nurses must be able to ask questions, explain procedures, provide instructions, and respond to patients' concerns clearly and accurately. Therefore, English for Nursing courses should place greater emphasis on communicative speaking activities, including role plays, simulations, and case-based discussions.

Nursing Students' Learning Goals

The findings demonstrate that nursing students have multiple reasons for learning English, with supporting future careers emerging as the most important goal (84.8%). Other prominent goals include communicating with foreigners (78.8%), traveling abroad (78.8%), understanding English texts and journal articles (69.7%), and working overseas (63.6%). The dominance of career-related goals reflects students' awareness of the increasingly global nature of healthcare professions. Many healthcare institutions require English proficiency for professional development, international collaboration, and access to global employment opportunities. This finding is consistent with Nata (Nata, 2025) who found that nursing students perceived English as essential for future employment and professional success. Similarly, Sofyan et al. (Sofyan et al., 2024)reported that nursing students viewed English as a strategic skill for enhancing career competitiveness.

The high percentage of students who wish to communicate with foreigners highlights the practical communication needs associated with nursing practice. Nurses may encounter

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foreign patients, participate in international conferences, or collaborate with healthcare professionals from different countries. Consequently, effective English communication becomes increasingly important in professional settings. This finding supports the concept of Target Situation Analysis proposed by Hutchinson & Waters (Hutchinson & Waters, 2010) which emphasizes identifying the language demands learners are likely to encounter in their future professional contexts.

Another important finding is that 69.7% of respondents reported learning English to understand reading texts and journal articles. This suggests that students recognize the role of English in academic literacy and evidence-based nursing practice. As medical and nursing knowledge continues to develop rapidly, healthcare professionals must access current research findings to provide quality care. Since many high-quality nursing journals are published in English, reading proficiency becomes a critical academic skill. Overall, the learning goals indicate that students view English not merely as a compulsory subject but as a practical tool for achieving both professional and academic objectives. This finding reinforces the need for English for Nursing courses that integrate workplace communication and academic literacy.

Nursing Students' Content Preferences

The findings reveal that students consider all proposed nursing topics important for English learning. However, several topics received particularly high ratings, including Patients' Admission, Educating Patients, and Standard Operating Procedures in Nursing (69.7%), followed closely by Checking Vital Signs and Reporting Health Problems (66.7%). The strong preference for topics such as patient admission, pain assessment, and patient education suggests that students prioritize language functions directly related to nurse-patient communication. These tasks represent common interactions encountered in clinical practice and therefore constitute essential communicative competencies for future nurses. This finding supports Wulandari et al. (Wulandari et al., 2019) who reported that nursing students preferred learning materials related to patient care, clinical procedures, and healthcare communication. Similarly, Staats et al. (Staats et al., 2026) found that nursing students favored authentic materials that reflected real nursing situations.

Students also rated Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) as highly important. This preference indicates that students recognize the importance of understanding professional documentation and procedural communication in healthcare settings. The result aligns with ESP principles emphasizing authenticity and relevance. According to Dudley-Evans & St John (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998) ESP materials should reflect the actual discourse, tasks, and communicative situations encountered in professional contexts. Therefore, incorporating nursing procedures, documentation, and clinical scenarios can increase the relevance and effectiveness of instruction.

The findings suggest that English for Nursing materials should be organized around authentic nursing tasks rather than general language topics. Course content should incorporate:

- Nurse-patient communication
- Taking patient history
- Assessing symptoms
- Giving instructions and advice
- Health education
- Clinical reporting
- Medical terminology
- Standard operating procedures

Such content would better reflect students' target needs and support the development of communicative competence required in healthcare environments.

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Implications of Needs Analysis

The findings collectively demonstrate that nursing students possess moderate English proficiency, strong career-oriented motivations, and clear preferences for nursing-specific content. These results confirm the importance of conducting needs analysis prior to designing ESP courses. In terms of Hutchinson & Waters framework (Hutchinson & Waters, 2010), the study identified students' lacks (limited speaking proficiency), wants (career development and international communication), and necessities (clinical communication and nursing-related content). Therefore, English for Nursing courses should be developed based on these identified needs to ensure relevance and effectiveness. Overall, the findings support previous ESP research indicating that successful English instruction should be learner-centered, context-specific, and aligned with professional demands. By incorporating students' proficiency levels, learning goals, and content preferences, educators can design more meaningful English for Nursing courses that better prepare students for future academic and professional challenges.

CONCLUSION

This study explored nursing students' English proficiency, learning goals, and content preferences for English for Nursing courses. The findings showed that most students were interested in learning English and viewed it as important for their future careers. Among the four language skills, reading was the strongest skill, while speaking was the weakest. Students mainly learned English to support their careers, communicate with foreigners, and access academic resources. They also preferred nursing-related topics, particularly patient admission, patient education, checking vital signs, reporting health problems, and standard operating procedures. These findings suggest that English for Nursing courses should focus on developing students' speaking skills and include authentic nursing-related content that reflects real workplace situations. This study has several limitations. First, it involved a relatively small number of participants from a single institution. Second, the data were collected only through questionnaires, which may not fully capture students' perspectives. Finally, the study relied on self-reported proficiency rather than objective language assessments.

For future research, it is recommended to involve a larger number of participants from different institutions and to use additional methods such as interviews or focus group discussions. Further studies may also examine other aspects of English for Nursing, including teaching strategies, learning materials, and workplace communication needs. Overall, conducting needs analysis is essential for developing English for Nursing courses that are relevant, practical, and aligned with students' academic and professional goals.

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