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Improving the Oral Communication Skills of Undergraduate Nursing Students With Language Support: A 6-Month Follow-Up

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Introduction: The global widening participation agenda in higher education along with increasing cultural and linguistic diversity, has led to a shift in the number of students who have English as an Additional Language (EAL), studying in countries such as Canada, Australia, the United States and United Kingdom (Garone & Van de Craen, 2017). In a discipline like nursing, it is essential that students are able to effectively communicate and interact with healthcare professionals and the public. For nursing students, vocabulary expands beyond textbook (Hull, 2016) terminology to a medical language which includes acronyms, abbreviations, and other expressions that must be explained in different ways among other health professionals and patients (Hull, 2016). Difficulties with pronunciation can also increase anxiety for nursing students during practicums, resulting in feelings of being stigmatised and unsupported (Allan & Westwood, 2016). As a result, both native English-speaking and EAL students may find it difficult to communicate in a clinical setting. While widening participation is important, higher education institutions need to implement strategies to support student retention and success, as these students are likely to experience challenges communicating in academic and clinical placement settings (Crawford & Candlin, 2013).

Methods: This study used a prospective, correlational survey design to examine the relationship between students' use of academic literacy support and oral communication performance as measured by a **C**oherence, **L**exical, **G**rammatical, **P**ronunciation (CLIP) index. The CLIP is a measure of oral communication competence based on a 4-item index with a descriptor framework for speaker use of: (i) fluency and coherence; (ii) lexical resource; (iii) grammatical range and accuracy; and (iv) pronunciation (Seedhouse et al., 2014). The CLIP index was embedded as an assessment requirement in four clinical skills-based units and assessed at the end of each semester in the first two years of the Bachelor of Nursing program, at a large multi-campus university in western Sydney, Australia. In this study, first and second year students were assessed in Semester 1 at baseline and also six months later in Semester 2. The CLIP index scores were linked to academic grades, enrolment status and use of academic literacy support.

Results: In 2015 a total of 1669 nursing students were assessed in both Semesters 1 and 2. Overall, mean oral communication scores improved from 15.8 (SD: 3.7) to 17.2

(SD: 3.3) ($p < 0.001$). Increases were also seen across all four components of the CLIP index (coherence, lexical resource, grammatical range and accuracy and pronunciation). There were seven (7) variables which included attendance at academic literacy support, the age and gender of participants, their country of birth, if they were the first-in-family at university, the language which was spoken at home, and enrolment category. A logistic regression model was used for these variables in examining the total CLIP index score and the predictors of improvement. The results revealed that students who engaged with academic literacy support were more than 1.5 times likely to gain an overall CLIP score increase (Adjusted Odds Ratio: 1.58, 95% CI: 1.26-1.98) in Semester 2, controlling for age, gender, language spoken at home, being born in Australian, being an international student, and first-in-family at university.

Discussion: This study adds strength to the available research. Others have identified the importance of using simulation to directly observe and evaluate not only clinical skills but competency in interdisciplinary communication (Choi, 2005; Mikkonen et al., 2016). Student improvement in oral communication using the CLIP index was evident among those seeking academic literacy support. The CLIP index tool can be used to track students' oral language skill needs over the course of their study, and can recognise and alert academics to the 'at-risk' student, who may require additional intensive support through on-campus programs.

Title:

Improving the Oral Communication Skills of Undergraduate Nursing Students With Language Support: A 6-Month Follow-Up

Keywords:

cultural diversity, interdisciplinary communication and nursing

References:

1. Allan, H. T., & Westwood, S. (2016). English language skills requirements for internationally educated nurses working in the care industry: Barriers to UK registration or institutionalised discrimination? *International Journal of Nursing Studies*, *54*, 1-4.
doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.ijnurstu.2014.12.006>
2. Choi, L. L. S. (2005). Literature review: issues surrounding education of English-as-a-Second Language (ESL) nursing students. *Journal of Transcultural Nursing*, *16*(3), 263-268.
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6. Mikkonen, K., Elo, S., Kuivila, H.-M., Tuomikoski, A.-M., & Kääriäinen, M. (2016). Culturally and linguistically diverse healthcare students' experiences of learning in a clinical environment: A systematic review of qualitative studies. *International Journal of Nursing Studies*, 54, 173-187. doi:10.1016/j.ijnurstu.2015.06.004
7. Seedhouse, P., Harris, A., Naeb, R., & Üstünel, E. (2014). Relationship between speaking features and band descriptors: A mixed methods study, The. *IELTS Research Reports Online Series*, 30.

Abstract Summary:

This study examined the relationship between students' use of academic literacy support and oral communication performance as measured by a Coherence, Lexical, Grammatical, Pronunciation (CLIP) index. The CLIP index tool can be used to track students' oral language skill needs over the course of their study.

Content Outline:

Introduction: The global widening participation agenda in higher education along with increasing cultural and linguistic diversity, has led to a shift in the number of students who have English as an Additional Language (EAL), studying in countries such as Canada, Australia, the United States and United Kingdom (Garone & Van de Craen, 2017). In a discipline like nursing, it is essential that students are able to effectively communicate and interact with healthcare professionals and the public. For nursing students, vocabulary expands beyond textbook (Hull, 2016) terminology to a medical language which includes acronyms, abbreviations, and other expressions that must be explained in different ways among other health professionals and patients (Hull, 2016). Difficulties with pronunciation can also increase anxiety for nursing students during practicums, resulting in feelings of being stigmatised and unsupported (Allan & Westwood, 2016). As a result, both native English-speaking and EAL students may find it difficult to communicate in a clinical setting. While widening participation is important, higher education institutions need to implement strategies to support student retention and success, as these students are likely to experience challenges communicating in academic and clinical placement settings (Crawford & Candlin, 2013).

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university in western Sydney, Australia. In this study, first and second year students were assessed in Semester 1 at baseline and also six months later in Semester 2. The CLIP index scores were linked to academic grades, enrolment status and use of academic literacy support.

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1. Allan, H. T., & Westwood, S. (2016). English language skills requirements for internationally educated nurses working in the care industry: Barriers to UK registration or institutionalised discrimination? *International Journal of Nursing Studies*, 54, 1-4.
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First Primary Presenting Author

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Author Summary: Lucie Ramjan is an Associate Professor in the School of Nursing & Midwifery at Western Sydney University. Lucie is committed to educational research supporting academic performance, literacy and numeracy needs. She has an interest in mental health research; has collaborated on multiple educational projects related to student retention and success; co-authored over 50 publications and supervises research higher degree students. She received a national teaching award in 2012 for her contributions to student learning.

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Author Summary: Dr Paul Glew is a Senior Lecturer, academic and researcher in the School of Nursing and Midwifery at Western Sydney University. His doctoral work examined English language education curriculum and his research interests lie in clinical nursing communication, English language and academic literacy in nursing.

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Author Summary: Associate Professor Everett's primary research interest lies in preventing and managing chronic disease, specifically cardiovascular disease and diabetes. She is particularly interested in health literacy and English language proficiency and how these impact on self-management of chronic conditions. Dr Everett also undertakes research which seeks to

improve the quality and safety of nursing care and patient outcomes, and how organisational and safety culture impact on healthcare.

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Author Summary: Yenna is a Professor and the Director of Academic Workforce at the School of Nursing & Midwifery with over 30 years of her academic career committed to creating a positive learning experience for students within nursing education. She has authored more than 160 peer-reviewed papers and numerous conference proceedings. Yenna has supervised 21 research students to completion, and is currently supervising 10 research students. Yenna has been a recipient of a number of teaching awards.