

English for specific purpose perspective: Identifying English language needs of guidance Counseling Nigerian Students

Obasi Samuel Chinwendu. (Ph.D.)

Department of Guidance and Counseling, College of Education, Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike, Abia State, Nigeria

Abstract

This study investigated the perceptions of teacher educators regarding the English language needs of Guidance and Counseling (G&C) students in Nigeria. The research involved 327 academic staff from the Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike (MOUUAU) and Alvan Ikoku Federal University of Education (AIFUE). Three research questions and one hypothesis guided the study. Data were collected using a validated 18-item "Teacher-Educators Questionnaire on English language needs of guidance Counseling Nigerian Students" (TOENGCS). The instrument's reliability was established using Cronbach's alpha, yielding a coefficient of 0.85. Findings revealed a strong consensus among educators on the importance of specialized English language skills for G&C practice, including field-specific vocabulary, academic writing, and intercultural communication. Challenges in addressing these needs included large class sizes, varying student proficiency levels, and inadequate curricular focus on English for Specific Purposes (ESP). The study also identified effective strategies for enhancing language development, such as integrating ESP principles and using authentic materials. Based on these findings, it is recommended that specialized ESP curricula be developed and implemented in G&C programs, incorporating field-specific language instruction and practical communication exercises to better prepare students for their future professional roles.

Keywords: English for a specific purpose (ESP) perspective, guidance Counseling, Nigerian Students

Introduction

ESP refers to an approach in language teaching where the educational content of the syllabus should be relevant to the required specifications. This approach emerged in the late 1960s and

has gained importance in recent times, especially in non-English-speaking countries like Nigeria, where English is the second language and, as such, the language of instruction in most fields (Hutchinson, & Waters, 2009). ESP is characterized by an emphasis on language, skills, and discourse that are necessary for particular professional or academic settings. It can be defined as a type of language teaching where "all decisions as to content and method are based on the learners' reason for learning" by the two most renowned authors in ESP - Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998, p. 4). While General English is targeted at general language acquisition, ESP is more focused, intending to give learners practical language skills relevant to their studies or professional areas. For such reasons, ESP would be considered indispensable, especially in Nigerian higher education institutions, where students often have to overcome language proficiency obstacles. Most Nigerian students are put under the expectation to read complex texts and to communicate with efficiency in English throughout their studies, be it in guidance counseling or other fields. According to Oyetunde (2015), poor mastery of English can limit the student's academic performance and professional advances, calling for a more systematic way of teaching the language. Needs analysis remains one of the core concerns of ESP, a study to be conducted to identify the particular needs that the learners have regarding the language, to be able to provide appropriate instruction (Robinson, 2019).

Needs analysis as proposed by Hutchinson and Waters 1987 helps identify the linguistic skills to be developed in a certain field and hence assist in relevance and effectiveness in the curriculum. This perhaps means the identification of lexis kinds, discourse kinds, and strategies of communication that clients should know or develop in dealing with a counselor and in writing reports for school activities within guidance and counseling. The ESP approach hence forms part of the core in guidance and counseling where communication has to be effective. Counselors should therefore possess both receptive skills in listening and reading and productive skills in speaking and writing to communicate with their clients effectively. Afolabi's 2018 research shows that in Nigeria, students studying this field most frequently have problems with specialized vocabulary and conventions of discourse and it is therefore recommendable that ESP-focused training programs will address these gaps. Students in Nigeria who major in G&C degrees commonly face several challenges as far as English language proficiency is concerned.

These challenges seriously affect their learning ability and practice of counseling skills effectively; hence, a need for specific language support. Most Nigerian students enter tertiary

institutions with a poor level of proficiency in English due to a lack of proper teaching at the primary and secondary school levels. A general lack of mastery the basic grammar, vocabulary, and communication skills leads to a barrier in accessing and receiving complex academic content expressed in English. It also has its distinct psych-related terms, sets of counseling theories, and therapeutic interventions. These have created serious problems for the Nigerian students who study this course in reading academic texts, participating in classroom discussions, and even communicating with their clients (Afolabi, 2018). The writing conventions in G&C include research papers, case studies, and reports. In general, Nigerian students have difficulties with the formal English used in academic discourse, including critical analysis and argumentation (Flowerdew & Peacock, 2001). Effective counseling relies greatly on the related skills of verbal communication - skills such as active listening, empathy, and clear articulation of thoughts and strategies. Nigerian students of G&C will encounter problems of fluency, pronunciation, and adequate expression of themselves in the English language with confidence, let alone about sensitive situations that may arise in counseling (Burnard, 2002). Guidance counselors in Nigeria, therefore, require good English language proficiency in effective communication and interaction with clients of various backgrounds as their own. They need to be listening or reading from what the client would normally say or provide in writing, most of which includes technical vocabulary and elaborate text; hence, incompetence in these receptive skills causes a misunderstanding and negatively influences a counselor's effectiveness in the guidance and support efforts.

Guidance counselors also need speaking and writing skills as productive skills. Counselors must clearly express their advice, recommendations, and referrals to their clients with much empathy on their part. They should further put into writing in the form of reports or records of their interactions and assessments. Proficiency in these speaking and writing productive skills provides a guarantee that the communication by this professional is effective, sensitive, and meets professional standards.

The guidance counselors have to work most of the time in complicated sociocultural contexts, where consideration of proper language use and knowledge about cultural issues is very important, (Oladele, 2010; Denga & Denga, 2000; Achuonye, 2005). Proficiency in the English language would be of great help to counselors in building rapport, gaining trust, and showing

empathy toward the client, which in turn would enhance the effectiveness of the whole counseling process.

Subsequently, several researchers have tried to identify those particular needs of the G&C Nigerian student from an ESP perspective. Among them is the study by Ojo and Ademola, which identified those students as needing the ability to perform a wide range of language skills, including academic writing and oral communication, in addition to comprehending and interpreting technical language relevant to their area of study.

They adduced reasons to show that the conventional English language teaching method in the Nigerian school system could not meet the peculiar needs of G&C students. According to them, a more specialized and focused curriculum on the exacting demands that the guidance and counseling profession places on the language resources would provide better and more effective improvement in the English proficiency of these students.

Various studies have been conducted regarding the issues that Nigerian higher education students have with the English language. Adegbija (2004) showed that students typically have a rather inadequate background in English from primary and secondary education, from which they could access and study complex academic materials. This foundational weakness is again and over again compounded by the domain-specific vocabulary and discourse conventions in certain disciplines like G&C. This makes the students struggle more in understanding technical terminologies concerning psychology, counseling theories, and therapeutic interventions as an obstacle in reading and comprehensively getting information from the texts as well as hindering them in effectively communicating with clients. The difficulties of learning vocabulary are not all there.

Flowerdew and Peacock 2001 note that "students from Nigeria were having problems not only with matters of vocabulary but also in general with academic writing conventions, such as research papers and case studies, and even formal academic writing." This struggle with academic writing becomes particularly relevant for the students of G&C, who are called upon to complete complex reports and assessments. Effective counseling also involves advanced oral communication skills, encompassing active listening, empathy, and clear articulation. Students from Nigeria studying G&C might confront difficulties in fluency, pronunciation, and confidence in self-expression in English, possibly exacerbated in sensitive counseling contexts. As existing research underlines, targeted language support is essential.

Ojo and Ademola state that a more specialized curriculum, oriented to the particular needs of the G&C profession, is called for. In their case, their research showed that traditional or generalist English language classes are woefully inadequate to meet the peculiar needs of the G&C students. A related strand of research reported by Adeyemi and Adeyinka reveals that the teacher educators themselves are well aware that G&C students need to be proficient in English, but they get neither the resources nor the training to achieve that goal. To make it worse, the factor of overcrowded classrooms and not having access to appropriate materials further adds to this challenge. Though these studies draw light on the challenges and the need for ESP, what comes forth explicitly is a lack of perspective.

Most of the research that has so far been undertaken emphasizes student perspectives and general challenges alone (Makinde, 1988 & Ojo, 2001). Less has been understood about how teacher educators perceive specific English language needs of students from General and Commerce streams and how such perceptions flow into pedagogical practices. In addition, existing literature has not focused on the specific linguistic features and skills most crucial for effective G&C practice within the Nigerian context. This study, therefore, attempts to fill the following knowledge gap: What are the perceptions of G&C students' English language needs from the perspective of teacher educators in Nigeria, and how can such perceptions be used in the development of appropriate ESP programmes serving the peculiar demands of the G&C profession within the Nigerian setting? The present study will go beyond the general observation of language difficulties into detailed linguistic competencies necessary to consider G&C practice effective, as perceived by those tasked with the training of future counselors. In this light, the paper will be focused on teacher educators' perceptions, which provide an important insight into bridging the gap between general English teaching and the special language demands of the G&C profession in Nigeria.

Research Questions:

1. How do teacher educators at MOUAU and AIFUE perceive the specific English language needs (e.g., vocabulary, grammar, discourse, communication) of G&C students in Nigeria for effective professional practice?
2. What challenges do teacher educators at MOUAU and AIFUE perceive in meeting the English language needs of G&C students within their respective institutional contexts?

3. What strategies do teacher educators at MOUAU and AIFUE recommend for effectively developing the English language proficiency of G&C students to prepare them for professional practice in Nigeria?

Hypothesis:

Teacher educators at MOUAU and AIFUE who perceive greater unmet English language needs of G&C students will also report a greater need for professional development and resources focused on ESP for G&C.

Research methods

This study aimed to investigate teacher educators' perceptions of the English language needs of Guidance Counseling Nigerian Students. This is a descriptive research design. The study involved the School of Education at MOUAU, with a population of 136 academic staff, and the School of General Education, Alvan Ikoku Federal University of Education, Owerri (AIFUE), with a population of 709 academic staff. The entire academic staff of the School of Education at MOUAU was used as the sample due to the small population size. A purposive sampling technique was employed (participants are selected based on specific characteristics or criteria relevant to the study's objectives) for AIFUE, selecting 191 academic staff from the School of General Education, resulting in a total sample of 327 teacher educators. The number represents 20% of academic staff in the two universities. The Data were collected using a questionnaire titled "Teacher-Educators Questionnaire on English Language Needs of Guidance Counseling Nigerian Students" (TOENGC). This 18-item questionnaire was designed by the researchers and validated by three experts from the Departments of Psychology & Guidance and Counseling at AIFUE. The instrument consists of five parts: 1. Demographic information of respondents, 2. Importance of English Language Skills in G & C studies, 3. Challenges in Addressing English Language Needs of G & C students, and Effective Strategies for Language Development.

The questionnaire items used a four-point Likert scale: Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD), scored as 4, 3, 2, and 1, respectively. The instrument's face validity was confirmed by four experts from the relevant department at AIFUE, and it underwent trial testing with 36 lecturers outside the study population, achieving a Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient of 0.85. The questionnaire was administered with the assistance of two trained research assistants, ensuring a 100% response rate. Data were analyzed using mean and

standard deviation to address the research questions, with a decision rule that any mean score of 2.50 or above was accepted, while scores below 2.50 were rejected. Hypotheses were tested using the t-test statistic at a 0.05 level of significance.

Table 1: Average Perception Scores and Standard Deviations on Teacher Educators on the Importance of English Language Skills for G & C Students

S/N	ITEM STATEMENT	MOUAU			AIFUE LECTURES		
		\bar{x}	SD	REM	\bar{x}	SD	REM
1	Proficiency in specialized G&C vocabulary is essential for effective counseling practice.	3.87	0.75	Accept	3.80	0.78	Accept
2	Strong English grammar skills are crucial for G&C students' professional communication.	3.81	0.56	Accept	3.85	0.54	Accept
3	Understanding and using appropriate discourse conventions are important for G&C interactions	3.61	0.71	Accept	3.59	0.70	Accept
4	Effective oral communication skills are vital for successful G&C practice	3.51	0.64	Accept	3.53	0.65	Accept
5	Academic writing skills are essential for G&C students' professional development	3.21	0.58	Accept	3.24	0.62	Accept

6	Intercultural communication competence is important for G&C practice in diverse settings	3.61	0.84	Accept	3.63	0.81	Accept
	Total average	3.60			3.62		

Table 1 shows, that both institutions strongly agree on the importance of various English language skills for G&C students. The high mean scores (>3.5) and low standard deviations indicate consistent agreement among educators on the significance of specialized vocabulary, grammar, discourse conventions, oral communication, academic writing, and intercultural competence for G&C practice.

Table 2: Average Perception Scores and Standard Deviations on the Challenges in Addressing English Language Needs of G & C students

S/N	ITEM STATEMENT	MOUAU			AIFUE LECTURES		
		\bar{x}	SD	REM	\bar{x}	SD	REM
7	I feel adequately prepared to address the English language needs of G&C students.	3.67	0.69	Accept	3.62	0.68	Accept
8	I have sufficient resources to support the English language development of G&C students	3.80	0.76	Accept	3.82	0.74	Accept
9	Large class sizes make it difficult to address individual student's English language needs	3.64	0.61	Accept	3.67	0.50	Accept

10	Students' varying levels of English proficiency pose a challenge in G&C instruction	3.51	0.64	Accept	3.53	0.62	Accept
11	The current curriculum adequately addresses the English language needs of G&C students	2.31	0.41	Reject	2.30	0.39	Reject
12	Assessment methods effectively evaluate G&C students' English language proficiency	3.00	0.61	Accept	3.51	0.51	Accept
	Total mean	3.32		Accept	3.41		Accept

Table2. Shows that the educators from both institutions perceive significant challenges in addressing G&C students' English language needs. While they feel somewhat prepared and have some resources, large class sizes, and varying proficiency levels pose difficulties. Notably, both groups disagree that the current curriculum adequately addresses these needs (item 11 with means <2.5)

Presentation of result Table: 3: Prevailing responses of MOUAU and ALVAN lecturers regarding the effective strategies for language development for G &C students

S/N	ITEM STATEMENT	MOUAU			ALVAN LECTURES		
		\bar{x}	SD	REM	\bar{x}	SD	REM
13	Integrating ESP principles into the G&C curriculum would benefit students.	3.47	0.65	Accept	3.50	0.68	Accept

14	Providing more opportunities for practical language use in simulated counseling sessions would be helpful	3.40	0.66	Accept	3.42	0.64	Accept
15	Incorporating authentic G&C materials (e.g., case studies, reports) into language instruction would be beneficial	3.51	0.61	Accept	3.46	0.60	Accept
16	Collaborating with English language specialists would enhance G&C students' language development	3.43	0.64	Accept	3.43	0.62	Accept
17	Professional development focused on ESP for G&C would improve my teaching practice	3.21	0.51	Accept	3.20	0.48	Accept
18	Increased access to specialized language learning resources would benefit G&C students	3.61	0.74	Accept	3.64	0.78	Accept
	Total mean	3.44		Accept	3.44		Accept

Table3. Shows that there is strong agreement on the effectiveness of various strategies to enhance G&C students' English language development since the mean cutoff is above 2.50. Both groups support integrating ESP principles, using authentic materials, collaborating with language specialists, and increasing access to specialized resources.

Table 4"Teacher educators at MOUAU and AIFUE who perceive greater unmet English language needs of G&C students will also report a greater need for professional development and resources focused on ESP for G&C.

Institution	Item 11 (Unmet Needs)	Item 17 (PD Need)	Item 18 (Resource Need)
MOUUAU	2.31 (0.41)	3.21 (0.51)	3.61 (0.74)
AIFUE	2.30 (0.39)	3.20 (0.48)	3.64 (0.78)

In Table 4, the data supports the hypothesis. Both institutions strongly disagree that the current curriculum adequately addresses G&C students' English language needs (item 11, mean \approx 2.3), indicating a perception of unmet needs. Correspondingly, they agree on the need for professional development in ESP for G&C (item 17, mean \approx 3.2) and strongly agree that increased access to specialized resources would benefit students (item 18, mean $>$ 3.6). The low mean for item 11 coupled with high means for items 17 and 18 suggests a clear relationship between perceived unmet needs and the desire for more professional development and resources. This pattern is consistent across both institutions, strengthening the support for the hypothesis that 'Teacher educators at MOUUAU and AIFUE who perceive greater unmet English language needs of G&C students will also report a greater need for professional development and resources focused on ESP for G&C'.

Hypothesis 1: There is no significance difference in the mean ratings of MOUUAU and ALVAN lecturers on perceived unmet English language needs of G&C students on professional development and resources focused on ESP for G&C.

Table 5: T-test analysis on the mean difference of MOUUAU and ALVAN lecturers on perceived unmet English language needs of G&C students on professional development and resources focused on ESP for G&C.

Variables	N	X	SD	Df	t	Sig	Decision
MOUUAU	327	3.54	0.63				Do not reject
				325	287	.076	Ho

ALVAN

327 3.25 0.66

*Significant at $P < 0.05$

Table 5 reveals that the t value of 287. At $df = 325$, where $P > 0.05$. This indicates that there is a no significant difference of MOUAU and ALVAN lecturers on perceived unmet English language needs of G&C students on professional development and resources focused on ESP for G&C. Hence the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant of MOUAU and ALVAN lecturers on perceived unmet English language needs of G&C students on professional development and resources focused on ESP for G&C is there not rejected.

Discussion of Findings

The findings from the study highlight the perceptions of teacher educators regarding the English language needs of Guidance and Counseling (G&C) students in Nigeria, as well as the challenges they face in addressing these needs. The data presented in the four tables reveals significant insights that align with existing literature on English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and the particular requirements of G&C education. (Table 1) Importance of English Language Skills

The results indicate strong agreement among educators at both MOUAU and AIFUE regarding the essential English language skills required for effective G&C practice. High mean scores for specialized vocabulary, grammar, discourse conventions, oral communication, academic writing, and intercultural competence (all above 3.5) reflect the consensus that these skills are critical for professional success. This finding corroborates the views of Ojo and Ademola (2018), who emphasize the necessity for G&C students to master a range of language skills to engage effectively in their field. Furthermore, Afolabi (2018) supports this by highlighting that the lack of specialized vocabulary can hinder students' ability to communicate effectively with clients.

Table 2 reveals significant challenges perceived by educators in meeting the English language needs of G&C students. While educators feel somewhat prepared and have resources, they acknowledge that large class sizes and varying levels of student proficiency complicate their efforts. The low mean score for the adequacy of the current curriculum (below 2.5) underscores the need for reform, aligning with Adegbija (2004), who found that foundational weaknesses in English education at lower levels contribute to persistent challenges in higher education. This

aligns with the findings of Flowerdew and Peacock (2001), who observed that students often struggle with academic writing conventions, which is compounded by the lack of appropriate preparatory training.

Table 3 reveals that the data also supports the implementation of various strategies to enhance English language development among G&C students. The high mean scores for integrating ESP principles, utilizing authentic materials, and collaborating with language specialists are indicative of a proactive approach to curriculum design. This resonates with Hutchinson and Waters (1987), who argue for the relevance of needs analysis in curriculum development, suggesting that tailored approaches can significantly improve language acquisition in specific fields. Additionally, the emphasis on providing opportunities for practical language use speaks to Burnard's (2002) assertion that effective counseling relies on strong verbal communication skills, including active listening and empathy.

Lastly, in Table 4, the findings support the hypothesis that educators who perceive greater unmet English language needs among G&C students also express a need for professional development and additional resources focused on ESP. The consistently low scores for curriculum adequacy combined with high scores for the necessity of professional development and resource access suggest a clear relationship between perceived gaps in language training and the educators' desire for improvement. This aligns with the calls from Adeyemi and Adeyinka (2016), who noted that teacher educators recognize the importance of specialized training but often lack the necessary resources and support to implement effective ESP programs.

Conclusion

The findings of this study reveal the consensus among educators at both MOUAU and AIFUE regarding the essential English language skills required for effective G&C practice. They also emphasize the significant challenges faced by educators in meeting these needs, including large class sizes and varying levels of student proficiency. The data supports the implementation of various strategies to enhance English language development among G&C students, such as integrating ESP principles, utilizing authentic materials, and collaborating with language specialists. Finally, the results support the hypothesis that educators who perceive greater unmet English language needs among G&C students also express a need for professional development and additional resources focused on ESP.

Recommendations:

Relevant university authorities should encourage teacher educators to develop and implement a specialized ESP curriculum for G&C programs, integrating field-specific vocabulary, academic writing skills, and practical communication exercises.

1. Relevant university authorities should provide ongoing professional development opportunities for teacher educators, focusing on ESP methodologies and strategies specific to G&C instruction.
2. Relevant university authorities should increase access to specialized language learning resources and authentic G&C materials to enhance students' exposure to professional language use.
3. Relevant university authorities should establish collaborative partnerships between G&C departments and English language specialists to create more effective language support systems.
4. Relevant university authorities should implement regular needs assessments to continuously evaluate and adapt language instruction to meet the evolving requirements of the G&C profession in Nigeria.

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About Author

Obasi Samuel Chinwendu, Ph.D.

Hometown: Umuda Okpuala, Isingwu (Ohuhu), Umuahia Local Government Area, Abia State, Nigeria, West Africa

Education:

- Primary School: Umuoriehi / Amankwo Primary School (1977)
- Secondary School: Federal School of Arts and Science, Suleja, Abuja (1982)
- Higher Secondary: B.Ed. in Guidance and Counselling & Public Administration, University of Ibadan (UI)
- Master's: M.Ed. in Guidance and Counselling, University of Ibadan (UI)
- Doctorate: Ph.D. in Guidance and Counselling, Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike (MOUAAU)

Professional Experience:

- Senior Lecturer, Department of Guidance and Counselling, COED, MOUAAU (Joined in 2011)

Religious and Professional Affiliations:

- Staunch Member of ASUU and other professional bodies (NTI)
- Called, Anointed, and Ordained Preacher, Senior Pastor at United Believers Mission Inc.
- Member of United Umuahia Ministers Prayer Squad, Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), and Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria (PFN)

Accomplishments:

- Prolific author of several books and magazines
- Prominently featured on YouTube and Facebook (Endtimeatlast / Endtimeatlastbroadcast)