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Editorial Note:

This latest issue of the Journal of Contemporary Society Education (JCSE) arrives at a moment when the boundaries between the academic, the social, and the urgently practical have never been more porous. A glance at the twenty-one articles in this forthcoming collection reveals a publication that understands its mandate: to serve not merely as a repository of scholarship, but as a sharp, coherent lens through which to examine the pressing complexities of contemporary society, with a firm grounding in education as a transformative force.

What distinguishes this issue is its refusal to settle for disciplinary comfort. The contributions, drawn from institutions across Africa, demonstrate a welcome intellectual restlessness. We see scholars interrogating the intimate, such as Mudau et al.'s exploration of language as a source of family conflict within Vhavenda families alongside those grappling with structural questions, such as Sikwela and Diedericks' critical look at performance management as "a mirror of inertia" in public administration. This range is not a sign of incoherence; it is a testament to the journal's understanding that societal education occurs in classrooms, in homes, in municipal water governance (as Zulu and Nojiyeza's work on Zululand shows), and in the very language we use to communicate.

Several pieces stand out for their conceptual bravery. Maungedzo's reframing of academic literacy through sociocultural theory for rural teacher development tackles a perennial challenge with fresh theoretical rigour. Similarly, Lubombo and Zethi's work on "linguistic justice" and the Disciplinary Literacies framework asks a question that South African higher education can no longer afford to postpone: how do we re-imagine instructional communication not as a barrier, but as an equitable foundation? These are not abstract debates; they are core pedagogical interventions.

The journal also demonstrates a commendable commitment to surfacing marginalised voices and experiences. Nkumane's exploration of intersectionality and the lived experiences of Black women scholars at UNISA, and Sibango's ethnographic look at how belonging is negotiated in Anthropology departments, remind us that the university itself is a site of intense social contestation. When Lekoa and Nojiyeza connect off-campus housing to "ecologies of distress" affecting student mental health, they do what good contemporary scholarship must: they trace the material conditions of life directly into the outcomes of education. If there is a through-line to this collection, it is the insistence that no social phenomenon, whether climate governance under the AU (Yemisi and Ani), the antinomies of decolonisation in literature (Moopi), or the gendered nexus of marital status and poverty (Dunga), exists outside the purview of rigorous inquiry. The JCSE is building a platform where scholars can hold those complex phenomena up to the light.

This volume does not offer easy answers. It offers something more valuable: a coherent, sharply focused set of questions, pursued with methodological care and regional relevance. For a journal of contemporary society and education, that is precisely the work that matters.

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ACADEMIC LITERACY REFRAMED: SOCIOCULTURAL THEORY AND RURAL TEACHER DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the impact of the English Communication Skills (ECS) module on Early Childhood Education student teachers' personal and academic lives. The study reveals that besides the module empowering students with essential teaching skills like academic writing, verbal communication, and critical reading, it enhances students' confidence, self-expression, and self-reliance. It also provides them with useful skills in navigating academic and professional challenges. The study uses a qualitative approach and collects data through a structured questionnaire that explores students' reflections on the module's significance and how it applies to their academic studies, teaching practice, and lives in general. The findings reveal that ECS significantly supports the students' academic preparedness and emotional well-being. They further show that students frequently applied ECS skills in other coursework and teaching practice, including writing coherent essays and communicating effectively in classroom settings. It also emerged that collaborative learning and peer interaction are significant elements for the creation of a supportive learning environment. The study highlights that academic literacy is not limited to technical abilities but also includes emotional and psychological dimensions to achieve students' holistic development. Through the integration of these attributes, the ECS module can transform student teachers into adaptable and empowered educators. These findings offer valuable insights into enhancing academic literacy instruction in higher education and emphasise the module's potential to prepare future educators for the complex teaching and learning demands. Although the study demonstrates the positive influence of ECS on students' holistic development, it is limited by its small sample size and reliance on self-reported data. The paper recommends further research involving multiple teacher-training institutions to provide comparative evidence.

Keywords: *Academic literacy, English Communication Skills, holistic development, collaborative learning, student teachers,*

Introduction

Any strategy or effort aimed at promoting societal and personal development may not be realised if education does not form the foundation of such endeavours. Effective communication is central to societal development, shaping how individuals interact, learn, and participate in social and professional spaces. Within educational

contexts, communication plays a foundational role in supporting learners' cognitive and emotional development and in enabling teachers to engage meaningfully with curriculum expectations. In South Africa, where higher education institutions serve linguistically and culturally diverse populations, academic literacy becomes an essential gateway to equitable participation and academic success. In higher institutions

of education in South Africa, academic literacy serves as the nucleus of most of the academic disciplines. For student teachers, especially those located in rural settings, the acquisition of academic literacy skills becomes a non-negotiable objective in their quest for both academic and professional achievements. The significance of academic literacy in this context is that it is not only confined to the ability to read and write but also involves students' ability to critically engage with texts, articulate ideas effectively, and adapt to the linguistic and cultural demands of academic discourse (Hyland, 2002; Wingate, 2012). South Africa is characterised by both linguistic diversity and socio-economic disparities, and for equity and quality education to become a reality, academic literacy should become a catalyst.

This study focuses on the English Communication Skills (ECS) module, a foundational academic literacy programme offered to Early Childhood Education (ECE) student teachers at a rural university in South Africa. These educators come from diverse geographical, cultural, ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds. They represent a province with at least four ethnic groups and various cultural traditions. For the student teachers to be admitted to the programme, practical experience in early childhood centres is prioritised over formal educational qualifications. Consequently, many of the participants have limited prior exposure to formal tertiary education. Some did not even study beyond Grade 11 and others have been out of formal education for over a decade. As a result, this module (English for Communication Skills) is their first exposure to academic literacy skills in tertiary education. For some of the students, it is their first time to be exposed to a module that strictly uses English as the medium of instruction. This compels students to make a significant adjustment. The cohort is comprised of individuals aged from twenty-two to over fifty years and with varying levels of prior education. Therefore, the ECS module becomes an essential stepping stone in their academic journeys. The purpose of

this study is to evaluate the module's impact on these student teachers in their academic and personal journey taking into consideration their rural background.

Jansen and Taylor (2003) point out that the rural areas in South Africa often suffer from inadequate access to educational resources, including textbooks, teaching materials, and even access to technology. This is exacerbated by the lack of internet access and educational technology. This prevents rural student teachers from engaging with online learning materials and resources that might be available to their urban counterparts (Ngcobo & Tikly, 2010). To support this notion, Mangat and Dlamini (2013) attribute the students' inability to gain practical teaching experience on their isolation taking into consideration that there are fewer mentorship opportunities or lack of qualified mentors in rural areas, as rural schools may have fewer mentorship opportunities or a lack of qualified mentors. Although the isolation is more materialistic, it also has a bearing on their linguistic competency in different educational contexts. Boughey (2000) avers that students may struggle with language barriers, resulting in them being unable to engage actively in assessments, assignments, and classroom discussions. These student teachers' academic performance and access to higher education are negatively influenced by their poor socio-economic backgrounds. (McCabe, 2011; Wilbraham, 2014). As a result, rural students may struggle with basic academic skills, including reading, writing, and critical thinking, which are essential for success in higher education (Rees & Solomons, 2010).

Problem Statement

Despite the recognised importance of academic literacy in teacher education, many Early Childhood Education (ECE) student teachers, especially those from rural and under-resourced schooling backgrounds, continue to experience substantial difficulties in acquiring the

literacy skills essential for academic and professional competence. Research shows that rural students often transition into higher education without adequate preparation in academic reading, writing, and critical thinking (Wingate, 2018; Rees & Solomons, 2010). While studies have examined academic literacy interventions in higher education, very few have focused specifically on how structured literacy modules impact ECE student teachers' academic, professional, and emotional development. Existing research also tends to focus on university-wide literacy programmes rather than on the unique needs of teacher education students, particularly in rural settings. This study addresses this gap by examining second-year ECE student teachers' perceptions of the English Communication Skills (ECS) module and its effectiveness in enhancing their academic literacy, teaching readiness, and personal development.

Literature Review

Academic literacy in teacher education

Some studies highlighting the importance of academic literacy in teacher education have been conducted. For example, Darling-Hammond (2006) emphasises that teachers with strong academic literacy skills engage better in reflective practice, assessing student progress, and contributing to the professional learning community. Snow, Burns, and Griffin's (1998) study suggests that teachers with well-developed literacy skills are more effective in fostering early literacy development in their students. While foundational studies such as Snow et al. (1998) and Darling-Hammond (2006) remain influential, recent research highlights new trends in literacy development within teacher education, such as shifting student demographics, rurality, digital literacies, and multilingual pedagogies.

For example, Pretorius & Klapwijk (2019) emphasise the expanding literacy gap between student teachers based in rural areas and those based in urban areas. In addition, they note that the targeted

academic literacy instruction significantly improves comprehension and writing outcomes. Sebolai (2022) and Nomlomo & Desai (2014) underscore the need for contextualised literacy support that responds to the linguistic, socio-economic, and educational backgrounds of student teachers. Studies by Makalela (2018) and Madiba (2023) demonstrate the significance of multilingual approaches in academic literacy development, especially in rural teacher education contexts. In the domain of teacher education, research further highlights how academic literacy shapes classroom readiness, curriculum engagement, and reflective practice (Hlengwa, 2021). These perspectives show a growing shift from purely technical approaches to literacy toward more socially situated and culturally responsive models. Consequently, the need to understand academic literacy development specifically within rural teacher education contexts is reinforced.

A study by Wingate (2018) explores the difficulties that university students with a rural background face in developing academic literacy, especially when shifting from secondary education. As a solution to the challenges, Wingate argues that explicit instruction in academic literacy, as provided by modules like English Communication Skills, is crucial for helping students overcome these challenges. Such instruction is important for early childhood student teachers because it prepares them to model literacy practices for young learners.

Academic literacy for Early Childhood Education (ECE) teachers

The area of academic literacy which generally refers to the ability to write in the expected discipline-specific ways has grown at South African universities in the last 40 years (Parkinson *et al.*, 2008). This coincides with changes in the student intake at South African institutions as there has been an increase in the number of students who may have attended schools which provided inadequate opportunities for

writing and reading. While all this was taking place on the one hand, the effectiveness of academic literacy courses has been the subject of many research papers on the other (Van Dyk, 2005; Parkinson et al. 2008; Sebolai, 2022). In most studies, the effectiveness of academic literacy courses is assessed by academics and/or scholars. However, this study focuses on the same issue—the impact of the English Communication Skills module—but positions Early Childhood Education student teachers as the arbiters. Academic literacy is a critical component of professional development for Early Childhood Education (ECE) teachers because it empowers them to navigate the demands of teaching and to engage with educational policies and research.

ECE teachers are expected to engage with curriculum documents, educational research, and teaching resources. Therefore, academic literacy enables them to interpret these texts, construct lesson plans, and apply evidence-based teaching strategies effectively. This notion is supported by Vukelich et al (2015) who claim that teachers can fulfil their professional responsibilities and competence because of them having acquired academic literacy skills. The significance of the relationship between student teachers and their acquisition of academic literacy within the learning and teaching contexts is illustrated in the section that follows:

Academic literacy encourages lifelong learning and teachers' currency through its promotion of research, critical reading and reflective practice (Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008). Early Childhood Educators who have acquired academic literacy skills can critically evaluate educational theories and are also able to base their teaching practices and approaches on research findings. (Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2011) declare that this capacity ensures that the educators' instructional strategies are grounded in evidence and, consequently, the quality of early childhood education is enhanced. Effective communication between ECE

educators and other stakeholders, including parents and administrators, is crucial. Bowman et al. (2001) assert that the two vital elements in early childhood school settings, namely, trust and collaboration, are enhanced through effective communication. Educators' academic literacy is closely linked to their ability to support young learners in developing foundational literacy skills. Educators who model strong literacy practices have stronger chances of inspiring children to become confident readers and writers and, therefore, set the stage for future academic success (Snow et al., 1998).

Academic literacy is a set of essential skills that form the foundation for success within academic communities (Hyland & Hamp-Lyons, as cited in Sanavi, 2012). Of most significance is Lea and Street's (1998) idea that academic literacy goes beyond reading, writing, and critical thinking to encompass emotional and psychological domains. These domains in turn, enhance confidence level, resilience, and sense of agency. For Early Childhood Education student teachers, mastering academic literacy is not just about academic success: it is also a critical component of their preparation as educators who will model and instil these skills in young learners.

The emotional and holistic dimensions of academic literacy

The English Communication Skills (ECS) module provides a structured approach to developing these competencies. It engages students in activities that refine their technical writing and communication abilities. In addition, it nurtures students' emotional readiness, self-expression, and the capacity to adapt to various contexts. Wingate (2018) argues that to develop students holistically, the scope of teaching academic literacy should not be limited to prescriptive rules and conventions. The implication is that there is a need for ECS to consider or include the affective domain in its content.

This paper highlights the interplay between technical skills and the emotional growth of the students and sheds light on how academic literacy transcends its traditional boundaries. Students were asked to share their overall thoughts on the significance of ECS in their studies and how the module has contributed to their understanding of academic literacy. Reflections also focused on whether ECS improved their academic writing and communication skills, the frequency of using skills learned in the module, and specific examples of how these skills have been applied in coursework or teaching practice.

Academic Literacy

As alluded in the previous sections, academic literacy encompasses a wide range of practices, skills, and strategies required to engage with, interpret, and produce academic texts effectively within specific educational contexts. Lea and Street's (1998) model provides a foundational framework that emphasises three perspectives: focus on technical competencies like grammar and essay writing which is often critiqued for its lack of attention to discipline-specific contexts. The second one is referred to as the academic socialisation model. This is characterised by the induction of students into academic conventions. The drawback of this perspective is that it overlooks the complexities of power dynamics and institutional expectations; the last one is the academic literacies model which frames literacy as a social practice shaped by cultural, institutional, and linguistic factors. Weideman (2006: 84) offers a comprehensive definition, outlining ten essential components essential for academic literacy. These include understanding academic vocabulary in context, interpreting metaphor, idiom, and ambiguity, recognising the logical structure of texts, and understanding how language connects various text parts. Students must also be able to interpret different genres, engage with visual or graphic information, distinguish between essential and non-

essential details, and identify relationships such as cause and effect. In addition, students must also grasp the communicative function of academic language forms, understand evidence-based argumentation, make inferences, and construct meaning beyond the sentence level.

The New Literacy Studies (Street, 1984; Gee, 1996), emphasise the social and contextual nature of literacy, while Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory accentuates the development of academic literacy through social interaction. Critical literacy (Freire, 1970; Luke, 2000) on the other hand challenges students to critique societal structures. Multiliteracies theory's perspective (New London Group, 1996) expands the concept to include digital and multimodal forms of communication. From the discussion, it is clear that academic literacy is multi-dimensional, and it is a socially embedded practice integral to effective academic engagement.

The role of English Communication Skills (ECS) module

The English Communication Skills (ECS) module is a core academic programme designed to equip first-year students with essential academic literacy skills. The module introduces students to the conventions of academic writing, critical thinking, and the effective use of information and resources in an academic context. It does not only also focus on reading, writing, and analysis of various forms of texts such as multimodal texts, narrative and expository texts, but also but it also encourages the students to comprehend and engage critically with the texts. The module also enhances students' academic writing ability by ensuring that they can identify credible sources, evaluate arguments, synthesise information, and communicate ideas clearly and ethically. The module also promotes critical thinking by teaching students to assess arguments, identify fallacies, and engage in logical reasoning. Furthermore, visual literacy is developed through interpreting visual texts

and arguments; while referencing and plagiarism are addressed to ensure students adhere to academic integrity. Students gain proficiency in producing cohesive, well-organised texts with clear logical flow and formal tone through structured academic writing activities. The ECS module is interactive, leveraging Moodle for online engagement, and actively encourages participation to prepare students for the academic demands of higher education. This comprehensive approach ensures that students are academically proficient and equipped with the critical and analytical skills necessary for success in diverse academic and professional contexts.

Method

This study adopted a qualitative research design to explore student teachers' perceptions of the English Communication Skills (ECS) module. Data were generated using a semi-structured questionnaire designed to elicit detailed reflections on the module's relevance, pedagogical approaches, and influence on students' academic literacy development. The questionnaire comprised six sections addressing demographic information, students' views of the module, lecturers' approaches, resource access, personal reflections, and open-ended feedback.

Purposive sampling was used to select twenty second-year Early Childhood Education (ECE) student teachers who had completed the ECS module. The inclusion criteria required that participants: (1) had successfully completed the ECS module in their first year, and (2) were currently registered in the second year of the teacher preparation programme. Students who had not completed the module or who had transferred from other institutions were excluded. The participants represented diverse age groups and educational backgrounds, with the majority coming from rural and low-resource environments. Data collection was conducted manually, and participants were allotted 30–45 minutes to complete the questionnaire. All

participants provided informed consent and were assured of confidentiality, anonymity, and the right to withdraw at any stage.

Open-ended responses were analysed using thematic analysis. The analysis followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step approach: familiarisation with the data, generating initial codes, categorising codes into themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the final report. Themes were aligned with key areas of academic literacy development, including academic writing, communication and critical reading, and confidence and preparedness for teaching roles.

Discussion

In this section, the focus is on early childhood educators' reflections on English Communication Skills. The reflections provided highlight several key areas of impact for the ECS module and showcase its value in improving both linguistic proficiency and interpersonal skills. The insights are summarised into five main themes.

Language proficiency and vocabulary development

The module had a profound impact on students' academic and personal development as many indicated that there had been a significant improvement in their use of the English language. They also acknowledged that their vocabulary increased, and that their grammar and pronunciation have improved and are now able to speak fluently every day. Some of the comments made by students on such aspects are as follows:

"Learning different words or new words."

"Helps in improving language structure."

"How to use correct words during communication."

"I found the part of academic literacy valuable."

In addition, the students indicated that they did not only benefit on language-related issues but that they also improved on

essential skills that are important for effective communication with others as depicted in the comments that follow:

"Building confidence in engaging in communication exercises."

"Learning to express ideas clearly."

"Developed effective collaboration and teamwork skills."

One of the objectives the module seeks to enhance and achieve is to ensure that students become critical thinkers and critical communicators who are able to confront and solve problems. In attaining this objective, students are not only required to be thinkers in a vacuum, but they are also expected to demonstrate the skills using language, that is, grammatically correct language.

"Empowering students to become more effective communicators, thinkers, and problem solvers."

"How to reference. Grammar."

From what the students indicated, the module facilitated their personal and social development. It also taught them respect and how to work with others:

"It taught me to respect others and learn to accommodate others."

"The way of communication and teamwork."

The students' comments were not only confined to the skills they acquired because of the module, but they also referred to the impact of the lecturer's delivery of the module:

"The way lecturers were delivering it."

"The lecture who teaches this module is pedagogical."

The students' comments give an impression that the module empowers them with a variety of skills, that is, foundational academic, social and practical skills.

Feedback and suggestions for English Communication Skills (ECS)

The feedback provided by students offers valuable insights into the strengths of the ECS module and areas for improvement. The comments can be categorised into key themes:

Student feedback highlights strengths and areas for improvement in the English Communication Skills (ECS) module. Students praised the pedagogical quality, noting the lecturer's clarity, approachability, and effectiveness. Many students indicated that the module played a big role in improving their confidence and communication abilities. As a result, their academic and interpersonal outcomes improved. The students also commented on pedagogy-related issues:

"The lecturer is pedagogical and audible."

"Teacher is understandable and gives time for use."

The students appreciated the quality and clarity of instruction and noted the lecturer's approachability and effectiveness.

"I'm now able to communicate with others and have confidence."

"This module has helped a lot, and I have passed."

Although most of the comments made by the students were positive, they also made some suggestions that should be implemented to enhance the module's effectiveness. The following are some of the suggestions made: Extension of the time allocated for lessons so that deeper learning can take place. They also appealed for the provision of more resources such as videos, booklets, and interactive tutorials. They emphasised the need for reinforcement of skills taught through regular practice, peer collaboration, and practical exercises. Their feedback also called for the integration of technology, including digital communication tools, online classes, and improvements to online assessment systems to address technical challenges and time constraints:

"Allocate more time for lecturing."

"The times allocated for the module were not enough."

The students consistently suggested extending the duration of the module to allow for deeper learning and practice.

"Provision of booklets or other resources to aid this module."

"Supplement traditional instruction with videos and interactive tutorials."

There is a clear need for more learning materials and practical exercises to reinforce the module content.

"Regular practice is needed for this module."

"Encourage peer collaboration."

The students emphasised the importance of ongoing engagement and peer interaction to strengthen their skills.

"Incorporate digital communication tools and platforms."

"More online classes are needed."

The students' feedback above highlights a need for integrating modern communication technologies and online instruction into the module.

"Improve the system used to write tests to avoid errors."

"Allocate more time for online tests."

In terms of content, students recommended expanding the module to cover cross-cultural communication and adaptability for diverse audiences, as well as incorporating more real-world applications to make learning relatable and practical:

"Incorporate lessons on cross-cultural communication and cultural intelligence."

"Emphasise the importance of adjusting communication styles for diverse audiences."

Expanding the module's scope to include cross-cultural communication and adaptability in diverse contexts was a recurring suggestion. The introduction of interculturality into an initial English for Academic Purposes like the ECS module could further empower first-entering students by contributing to a sense of familiarity and reducing student anxiety in a new and unfamiliar environment with its own culture and specific discourse, which

the first-year students still need to acquire. Interculturality in the language classroom is likely to add to their empowerment by increasing self-esteem and confidence. introducing one's culture to others may enhance the degree to which students see themselves in the curriculum, and in turn how welcome they feel in school. Feelings of self-worth are critical (McCabe, 2011: 56). This should encourage student participation because it will involve familiar topics and acknowledge their worldview while gradually introducing them to a new one. At the preliminary level, pragmatic academic literacy is called for to help familiarise students with the conventions of academic discourse until they can use it to critique (McCabe, 2011).

"Incorporate real-world scenarios."

"Offer diverse learning materials."

Overall, students recognised the value and relevance of the ECS module, advocating for its continued inclusion in the curriculum to support future learners in developing essential communication skills for academic and professional success:

"This module is very important to students because most documents are in English."

"May this module be kept in the future to assist upcoming students."

Students' perspectives on the ECS module

The ECS module is highly valued for improving students' academic skills, encouraging their confidence, and promoting practical application. Most students attributed their improvement in academic writing, presentation, teamwork, and critical thinking skills to their engagement with the module. Consequently, the students felt that they were better equipped to partake in meaningful discussions, complete their assignments and master the use of academic conventions. The remarks below encapsulate these notions about the module:

"Empowers individuals to effectively convey thoughts, ideas,

and opinions in a clear and articulate manner.”

“It motivates and enhances engagement in reading discussions.”

One of the recurring themes conveyed by the students was that of confidence building, especially in oral presentations and written communication:

“I am now able to present my presentations with confidence in front of my peers.”

In addition to confidence building, the module also encouraged collaboration and teamwork. Some students appreciated the module’s emphasis on group discussions:

“It also helped me to work well with my team/groups,” one respondent observed.

Although most students’ reflections draw a perfect picture of the module, some students’ reflections highlighted some challenges. As one student explained,

“It is difficult, but the minute you give yourself time to study/learn it, it becomes easier”.

These challenges, however, were often viewed as opportunities for growth. In addition, the students appreciated the practical application of the skills learned, such as understanding English documents and effective communication. One student reflected,

“It helps me to develop my communication skills with others.”

The application of ECS in students’ studies and their teaching practice

The students offered specific examples of how they apply ECS skills in their coursework and teaching practice and also highlighted its practical relevance and versatility. Most indicated that they applied what they had learned in the following activities: when they were writing assignments, structuring essays, referencing, and delivering presentations. In addition, the students indicated that the module’s impact extends to classroom implementation whereby educators used skills like sentence construction, reading strategies, and phonics instruction to

support their learners. Unexpectedly, the students revealed that they have effectively applied ECS skills in professional settings, such as parent-teacher meetings, collaborative projects, and lesson planning. This demonstrates the value of the module in the teaching profession.

The key aspects of ECS that were identified by students as being applicable to their studies and future careers focused on academic foundational skills, communication, and adaptability. The aspects covered under academic foundational skills include sentence construction, summarising, referencing, and grammar. These were regarded by students as crucial for academic and professional success. Written and oral communication skills, including non-verbal communication, were also regarded as essential for effective teaching and collaboration work. Furthermore, students emphasised how the module has prepared them for creating structured lesson plans, evaluating learners, and providing constructive feedback. The ECS module has proven highly relevant in academics by equipping students with essential skills such as crafting well-structured assignments, effectively referencing academic sources, and engaging confidently in discussions and presentations. In addition, many respondents highlighted the module’s practical application in their teaching practice, where these skills are actively used to enhance reading, writing, and classroom communication with learners, colleagues, as well as with parents.

Academic and professional application

It is clear from some of the remarks made by students that the ECS module has significantly enhanced students’ capabilities in various academic and professional areas. For assignments and academic work, skills such as essay writing, paraphrasing, referencing, and constructing clear sentences have become indispensable across all modules. When it comes to presentations and discussions, the module

has improved students' confidence in expressing their ideas, engaging in debates, and communicating effectively in group settings. Some students highlighted the practical application of these skills in classroom teaching and in using them to teach sentence construction, spelling, reading strategies, and phonics. They emphasised the importance of encouraging learners to listen actively, think critically, and ask questions. For example, students are taught to stop, think, and ask questions to understand unfamiliar words better. In addition, the module has been helpful in preparing the students to plan lessons and also incorporate effective communication strategies and conduct meetings with parents and colleagues using clear, professional language.

The ECS module has been pivotal in developing foundational skills that extend beyond the academic sphere. Many respondents highlighted significant improvement in writing skills, including essay structure, sentence construction, grammar, and summarisation, as key areas of their academic growth. In oral communication, students reported being better equipped for public speaking, participating in group discussions, and presenting ideas confidently and clearly. The module has also emphasised the importance of active listening and critical thinking as this enables students to engage thoughtfully with academic texts and participate in meaningful dialogue. Additionally, the skills gained through the module have enhanced teamwork and collaboration and allowed students to work effectively in diverse groups while fostering adaptability and mutual respect.

Long-term impact of ECS on teaching and career development

The ECS module's relevance to students' future careers, particularly as educators, was a recurring theme in the responses. Many respondents highlighted the applicability of ECS skills in teaching. They also noted the skills usefulness when

planning lessons, evaluating learners, and tailoring lessons to meet diverse needs. Clear and concise communication, whether in written or oral form, was identified as a base for effective interaction with learners, colleagues and parents. Furthermore, students reported using strategies learned in ECS to enhance learner engagement through the incorporation of vocabulary-building exercises and teaching phonics. This demonstrates the module's direct impact on fostering an engaging and effective learning environment. Lastly, respondents emphasised how the module's focus on academic literacy, referencing, and effective communication will benefit them in their ongoing studies and professional growth.

Challenges and possible improvements

While the overall feedback on the ECS module is positive, a few challenges emerged. Some students found some aspects of critical thinking and teamwork particularly difficult, suggesting a need for more guided practice or workshops to support these areas. Additionally, a few students expressed difficulty applying certain skills in specific contexts, such as group work or professional meetings. This indicates that targeted support might be necessary to help them bridge these gaps. Furthermore, students who left no comment or reported using the skills "occasionally" may benefit from additional interventions to fully realise the module's potential and ensure they can apply the skills more consistently in their academic and professional lives.

Based on the students' comments, it becomes apparent that the English Communication Skills module is the foundation on which their academic literacy development and professional competence are based. This is because it fosters critical writing skills, communication, and critical thinking that directly apply to their studies and careers. Many respondents attest to the module's value, both in their academic pursuits and teaching practices. To further

maximise ECS's impact, efforts could focus on addressing challenges faced by a minority of students and enhancing real-world application opportunities. Generally, the ECS module not only equips students with essential skills but also lays the foundation for lifelong learning and effective communication in diverse professional contexts.

Analysis

How ECS contributed to understanding Academic Literacy

The students attributed their improvement in academic writing skills such as referencing, paraphrasing, sentence construction, and avoiding plagiarism on the module. One student attested:

"It taught me how to reference on my assignments and how to structure them."

The module also enabled the students to articulate ideas that are complex, engage with academic texts, and develop critical thinking as demonstrated in the following comment made by a student:

"I have gained familiarity with various writing styles, formats, and conventions."

There were some few remarks that accentuated personal growth in academic literacy. Some students expressed greater confidence in their ability to produce high-quality work:

"My academic literacy has improved drastically, and I can express myself with confidence."

The module's positive impact on writing and vocabulary was frequently alluded to, with improvements in grammar and sentence construction enhancing academic and professional readiness:

"It has improved my grammar and spelling basics. Now I can write with correct spelling."

ECS also contributed to verbal and written communication. This led to more students feeling more comfortable sharing ideas and engaging in group discussions.

"I feel confident when sharing my ideas, able to write and speak more clearly," one student remarked.

Furthermore, the module taught students basic skills for navigating academic activities such as presentations, essays and reports.

"I can now express my thoughts or ideas clearly," said another.

The responses indicate that the ECS module plays a transformative role in students' academic and professional development. The key strength of the module lies in its ability to build confidence, enhance communication, and improve literacy skills, all of which are directly applicable to students' current and future roles as educators. However, some students found the module challenging, particularly in areas that demand critical thinking and teamwork, highlighting opportunities to provide additional support or scaffolding to ensure all learners can fully benefit from the programme.

Student reflections on the English Communication Skills (ECS) module

The reflections from the students reveal the transformative nature of the English Communication Skills (ECS) module on their academic, professional, and personal development. The following analysis synthesises all responses to uncover key themes and implications.

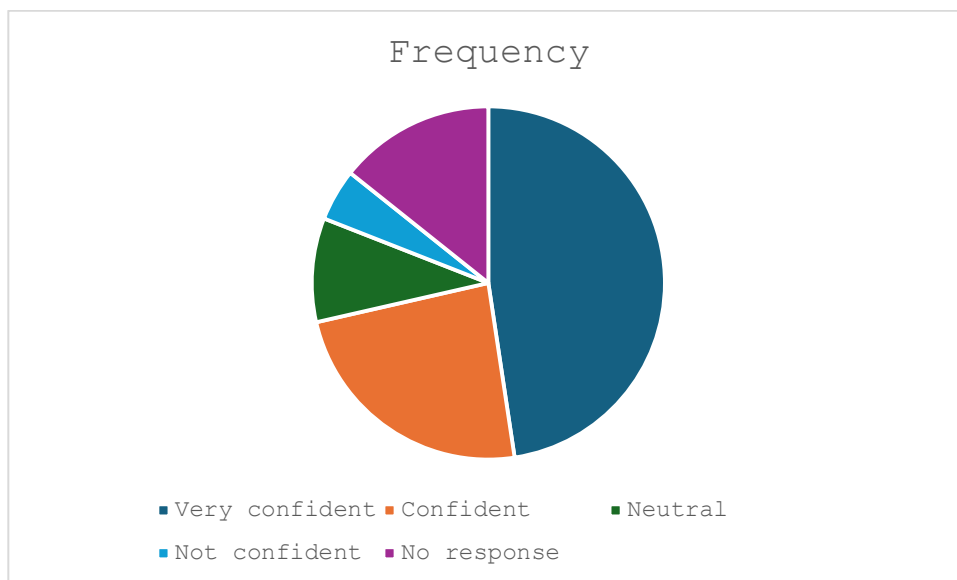


Figure 1: Confidence levels amongst respondents in frequency assessment.

The survey results in Figure 1 highlight several strengths and weaknesses of the ECS module. The high percentage of "Very confident" and "Confident" responses (seventy-five percent) demonstrates that the module has largely succeeded in equipping students with the necessary skills for their studies. However, the 10% of "Neutral" responses, five percent "Not confident," and fifteen percent who did not respond indicate areas for improvement. These responses suggest that some students may require additional support, or that there may be a need to clarify the module's relevance. In

order to address these challenges, targeted interventions such as additional workshops or personalised feedback could be introduced to support students who feel less confident. Furthermore, the lack of responses from fifteen percent of students could indicate potential barriers to participation. This should be addressed to ensure inclusivity in future evaluations. Lastly, further qualitative feedback could be explored to understand the root causes behind the "Neutral" and "Not confident" ratings as this will help to tailor intervention measures more effectively.

Frequency and extent of skill utilisation

Most students indicated that they apply the skills learned in the ECS module "very often" or "often" in their studies and professional settings.

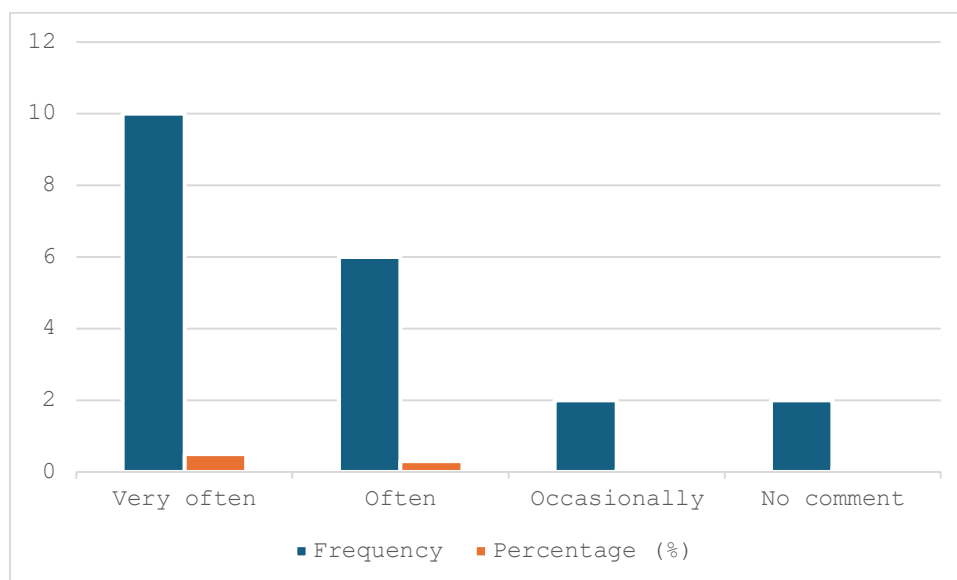


Figure 2: Frequency of responses indicating the use of academic literacy skills

As reflected in the table above, the majority of respondents, fifty percent, reported using the skills learned in the ECS module "very often." This highlights the module's high relevance and integral role in students' current studies. An additional thirty percent stated that they use the skills "often," indicating consistent, though slightly less frequent application. A smaller group, ten percent, reported using the skills "occasionally." This suggests lesser dependency on these skills in their specific study contexts. Meanwhile, another ten percent chose "no comment," which could reflect a reluctance to answer or a lack of clarity regarding the module's impact on their academic activities.

The highest percentage (eighty for "Very often" and "Often") indicates that the ECS module effectively equips students with skills they find applicable in their academic work. The ten percent for "Occasionally" and ten percent for "No comment" could suggest areas where the module's relevance or applicability might be less obvious. This should warrant further investigation into specific fields of study or individual learning experiences. This might also indicate a potential need for personalised

intervention to address particular challenges or gaps in the application of the module's content. These findings can guide curriculum designers to enhance the module's coverage to make it more universally applicable and address gaps in its perceived utility.

The ECS module has proven that it is highly relevant in academics as it equips students with essential skills such as those needed when writing well-structured assignments and referencing academic sources effectively. Finally, many respondents highlighted the module's practical application in their teaching practice activities such as reading and writing, and during classroom communication with learners, colleagues, and parents.

Insights for curriculum development

Although several suggestions were made towards the improvement of the module, the most important one that relates to curriculum development calls for further integration of the module's content with practical teaching scenarios. This could make the skills learned even more impactful in real-world contexts. In addition, incorporating more role-playing,

simulations, and case studies could help students narrow the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application, particularly in communication. To sustain skill development beyond the classroom, offering ongoing support such as peer feedback sessions, language labs, and communication workshops would provide students with continued opportunities to refine and apply their skills in diverse settings. This analysis indicates that ECS plays a vital role in strengthening academic literacy, confidence, and overall communication skills. By addressing the outlined recommendations, the module can become even more impactful.

Throughout this paper, students overwhelmingly recognised the ECS module as a vital component of their academic journey. They also highlighted its transformative impact on various skills and abilities. A recurring theme is the boost in confidence, particularly in verbal communication and public speaking something which many students did not have before studying the module. In addition, the students praised the module for improving their essential academic and professional skills such as writing, teamwork, grammar, vocabulary, and the ability to express ideas clearly. Students also indicated the role played by the module in encouraging critical thinking and problem-solving skills. There were many instances wherein students' remarks accentuated the transferability of these skills to other modules and translated into authentic contexts. Finally, the effect and significance of group work were also emphasised.

Recommendations

The students recommended increasing contact hours and providing additional resources, such as online classes and supplementary materials to enhance the module's impact.

“The times allocated for the module were not enough; we need more online classes,” one suggested.

Incorporating digital tools, interactive tutorials, and lessons on cross-cultural and digital communication could make the module more engaging. There was also a need for the inclusion of lessons on cross-cultural communication and the use of digital communication tools. Students must be allowed to practice regularly what they had learned in the module and receive a prompt but individualised feedback to reinforce learning. The module should also promote peer collaboration through discussions and group activities. These interactions could be vital as they could further enhance students' self-confidence and their skill development.

Conclusion

From the students' responses, it becomes clear that the ECS module has had an impact on them in different contexts. Some students improved their language proficiency and as a result, their communication skills improved as well. The improvement was not limited to academic aspects as some students indicated that the module promoted personal growth, fostered respect, enhanced teamwork and collaboration. It has enabled students to apply the skills that they have acquired or learnt in class in the real-world scenarios. Furthermore, the module has provided an engaging and effective learning environment which has been supported by quality instruction that has contributed to students' overall academic and professional development. These outcomes reflect the module's comprehensive approach to equipping students with essential academic literacy and communication competencies.

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