

# Aligning the English language content of Quebec undergraduate nursing programs with the linguistic needs of the prospective nurses in healthcare contexts

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## Objectives

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- To investigate the role of the nursing programs (offered in Quebec universities) in preparing prospective nurses to use English for communication with the English-speaking community in Quebec healthcare contexts

## Objectives

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- In particular, the study targets the content of the undergraduate nursing programs in Quebec universities, and the extent to which the English language demands of these programs are representative of the language knowledge and skills required of nurses when communicating in English in health care contexts.

## Background

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- Communication problems between health professionals and patients, who belong to a linguistic minority group, could potentially compromise patients' access to equitable health care (Braveman & Gruskin, 2003; Canadian Medical Association, 2005; Chen *et al.*, 2010; O' Neill, 2005; Stewart *et al.*, 2011; Wadensten, 2005).

## Background

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- Language and literacy barriers have adverse effects on clinical effectiveness, medical decision making, medication adherence, and patients' understanding of/access to services (Amalraj, Starkweather, Nguyen , Naeim, 2009; Katz , Kripalani , Weiss *et al.*, 2006; Ngoh 2009, Safeer & Keenan 2005; Salazar 2010; Taylor *et al.*, 2013).
- At the level of provider/patient interaction, these barriers can also lead to misdiagnosis and misuse of interventions, under-diagnosis, and the under-utilization of treatment and services (Brach & Fraser, 2000; Koehn, 2005).

## Background

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- Studies focusing on minority languages in non-Canadian contexts point to professionals' perceptions and knowledge of the minority language as a determining factor in health and social services and the foundation of intervention (Gil-Gonzales *et al.*, 2015; Koehn, 2005; Snowden *et al.*, 2011; Taylor *et al.*, 2013).

## Problem

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- Few studies have focused on particular linguistic issues faced by health and social services professionals working in bilingual settings like Canada.
  - French for anglophones (Drolet *et al.*, 2014)
  - English for francophones (Issacs *et al.*, 2011)
- No systematic studies have been done on the quality and extent of second language training in university programs training healthcare professionals.

## Target Population

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- **Pre-service Nurses , In-service Nurses**
  - Addressing nurses' language problems is particularly important since nurses are on the front line of patient care.



## Context of the Study

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1. Université Laval
2. Université de Montreal
3. Université de Sherbrooke
4. Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières
5. Université du Québec à Rimouski
6. Université du Québec en abitibi-temiscamingue
7. Université du Québec à Chicoutimi
8. Université du Québec à Outaouais

**Nursing programs' overall objective:** *To prepare prospective nurses for the “Practice of the Profession”*

## ‘Practice of the Profession’

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- The practice of nursing consists in assessing health, determining and carrying out the nursing care and treatment plan, providing nursing and medical care and treatment in order to maintain and restore the health of a person in interaction with his environment and prevent illness, and providing palliative care (Nurses Act: Section 36, 2016).

## **Reserved Nursing Activities**

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- 1) assessing the physical and mental condition of a symptomatic person;**
- 2) providing clinical monitoring of the condition of persons whose state of health is problematic, including monitoring and adjusting the therapeutic nursing plan;**
- 3) initiating diagnostic and therapeutic measures, according to a prescription;**
- 4) initiating diagnostic measures for the purposes of a screening operation under the Public Health Act (chapter S-2.2);**

## Reserved Nursing Activities

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- 5) performing invasive examinations and diagnostic tests, according to a prescription;
- 6) providing and adjusting medical treatment, according to a prescription;
- 7) determining the treatment plan for wounds and alterations of the skin and teguments and providing the required care and treatment;
- 8) applying invasive techniques;
- 9) participating in pregnancy care, deliveries and postpartum care;

## Reserved Nursing Activities

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- 10) providing nursing follow-up for persons with complex health problems;
- 11) administering and adjusting prescribed medications or other prescribed substances;
- 12) performing vaccinations as part of a vaccination operation under the Public Health Act;
- 13) mixing substances to complete the preparation of a medication, according to a prescription;
- 14) making decisions as to the use of restraint measures;

## Reserved Nursing Activities

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- 15) deciding to use isolation measures in accordance with the Act respecting health services and social services (chapter S-4.2) and the Act respecting health services and social services for Cree Native persons (chapter S-5);**
- 16) assessing mental disorders, except mental retardation, if the nurse has the university degree and clinical experience in psychiatric nursing care required under a regulation made in accordance with paragraph g of section 14; and**

## Reserved Nursing Activities

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**17) assessing a child not yet admissible to preschool education who shows signs of developmental delay, in order to determine the adjustment and rehabilitation services required.**

## Research Design

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- Sequential mixed-methods design (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2011)
- Conducted in two phases over two years (2015-2017)



## Research Questions: Phase I

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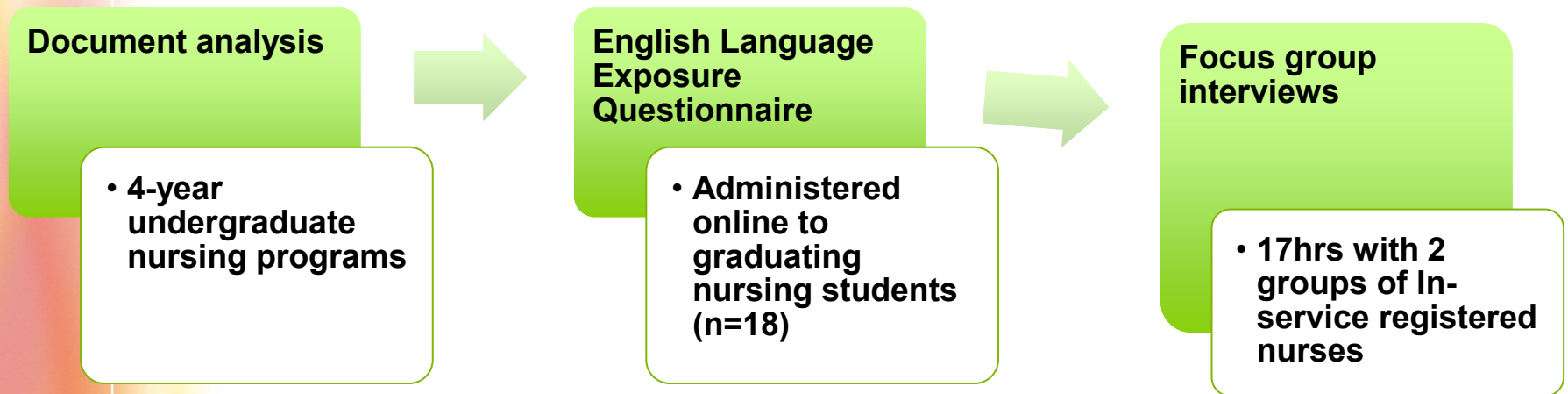
- 1. What are the English language admission and exit requirements for the nursing programs in Quebec francophone universities?**
- 2. What is the nature and extent of English language exposure among nursing students during their undergraduate years in francophone universities, as described in academic documents and perceived by program directors/instructors and the students themselves?**

## Research Questions: Phase I

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- 3. Are specific features of the English language practiced in undergraduate programs representative of the communicative abilities required of nurses for performing the 'reserved nursing activities' in English in actual health care contexts?**

# Phase I: Qualitative Study



# Phase I: Data Collection

## Document analysis (RQ1)

- English language courses offered as part of the requirements for the completion of the degree
- English language content, if any, of the disciplinary and practical courses

## English language exposure questionnaire (RQ2)

- to gain insight into the proportion of spoken/written English in the language input of the students during their undergraduate studies in nursing programs and in real-life,
- to determine the type and nature of such input: whether it is direct language training through, for example, ESL, EAP or indirect exposure, through readings and/or interactional (including clinical) activities for the courses that are normally offered in French

## Focus group interviews (RNs)

- An analysis and description of the linguistic content of the 17 'reserved nursing activities' listed in Quebec Nurses Act (2015, Section 36, par. 1) resulting in a preliminary list of nursing tasks requiring proficient use of language
- Detailed formulation of the language abilities (Bachman & Palmer 2010) required for performing above tasks: Language macro-skills, Language components, Language strategies
- Determining the required proficiency level for performing each task in terms of the 6 reference levels (CEFR)
- Focus group discussions with selected practicing nurses to discuss their perception of the relevance and the difficulty level of each task and their perceived preparedness for performing the tasks

## Phase I: Results

### Document Analysis (Quebec Nursing Programs)

- No language admission/exit requirements
- ESL courses not required in most universities (if required, one or two ESL courses at intermediate level)
- Materials used in class all in French; textbooks translated to French
- Practicums, internships do not provide English exposure, reports required in French

### Reserved Nursing Acts analysis

- All but one nursing act involve language-related tasks
- Language-related tasks (identified based on a comprehensive review of the Previous Literature)
- **12 speech tasks involved to carry out the 17 nursing acts**
- Linguistic complexity ranges from upper-intermediate (CEFR B2 level) to advanced<sub>21</sub> (CEFR C2 Level)

# Phase I: Results

## Focus Group Interviews with In-Service Nurses:

- all 12 speech tasks confirmed as relevant and important in the nursing profession
- technical/medical communication found to be more difficult than emotional communication conveyed in L2
- very few encounters with English speaking patients noted
- very few nurses able to communicate with English-speaking patients independently
- nurses rely on patients' family members and other hospital staff for communication in L2
- Nurses consider in-service English language training offered as non-compulsory evening courses as practical

## Students' language exposure questionnaire

- hardly ever use English in their education milieu to complete courses, communicate with professors, classmates, patients in internships
- sometimes read education-related material in English
- mostly exposed to non-academic material in English (music, movies, TV, etc.)
- acknowledge the importance of English; motivated to learn English
- most believe L2 education must be a part of their professional education
- majority open to receiving L2 education either as part of their undergraduate program or as on-the-job training

## Phase I: Conclusions

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- **The degree and quality of the English language exposure in undergraduate nursing programs do ‘not’ correspond to the complexity and variation of the linguistic tasks necessary for performing the RNAs in English**
- **English language training is rarely offered as part of the undergraduate nursing programs in Quebec universities,**
- **The courses offered in certain university nursing programs are not discipline oriented or advanced enough,**
- **Effective second language learning should be embedded into the program**

## Phase I: Conclusions

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- **The breadth and depth of L2 training in nursing programs should be determined based on a systematic and comprehensive needs assessment**
- **Needs assessment should be designed to identify not only the linguistic elements to be promoted in language courses but also the motivational, contextual, and socio-cultural factors involved in second language use in Quebec healthcare contexts.**



## Research Questions: Phase II

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- 1. What are the stakeholders' (students, program directors, practicum supervisors, professors, in-service nurses) perceptions of the 'current' English language tasks/abilities promoted through the academic content of the nursing programs?**
- 2. What are the stakeholders' perceptions of the language 'tasks' fundamental to the successful completion of the RNAs? And, what are the specific 'constructs' necessary for performing such tasks?**
- 3. From a content perspective, which disciplinary courses are suited to the training that targets the English language needs identified in Q2?**

## Phase II: Quantitative (ongoing)

### English Language needs assessment

- Undergraduate students in nursing programs



### English Language needs assessment

- Program directors, professors, practicum supervisors

# Phase II: Data Collection (Bachman & Palmer, 2010; Long, 1995)

## Student Questionnaire

- General information regarding the students' language background, the type of language tasks they perform, the professional/academic contexts in which they use English,
- Their perception of the importance of English for performing their job
- Their perception of their English language ability
- Their suggestions for improving the English language content of the nursing programs

## Directors'/Professors' Questionnaire

- Program directors'/professors perceptions of the importance of improving the English language proficiency of the students enrolled in the nursing programs
- Areas of language ability that nursing students need to master
- Their suggestion/comments as to how the English language content of the nursing programs can be improved

## Interim Results: Phase II

Stakeholders' perceptions with respect to the importance of English language for future nurses' academic and professional success.	Program directors/Professors/Practicum supervisors n. 17	Students n. 131
The importance of English for success in undergraduate studies	80%	51.5%
Students' proficiency level in English not adequate for the successful completion of the program	70%	48.5%
Graduating students' proficiency level in English not adequate for performing nursing tasks in English	100%	75%
English language is not used during practicum activities in my program	80%	88.5%
The nursing program in my university does not purposefully prepare the students for performing nursing tasks in English	100%	91.6
Graduating nurses should have functional knowledge in English	60%	75%
Nursing programs should offer English language training	20%	62%
At least one practicum should be offered in English	40%	37.4%
An English language admission test should be required by the program	40%	23%
Some content courses should be offered in English	10%	45%

## Interim Results: Phase II

Stakeholders' perceptions with respect to the areas and level of English language ability required by the university nursing programs and the health care contexts	Program directors/Professors/Practicum supervisors n. 17	Students n. 131
<b>English language proficiency level <span style="color: red;">required</span> by my program content:</b> Oral Production Oral Comprehension Written Production Written Comprehension	<b style="color: red;">Beginner</b> 80% 70% 80% 60%	<b style="color: red;">Beginner</b> 72% 72% 64% 48%(inter.)
<b>English language proficiency level <span style="color: red;">necessary</span> to perform nursing activities:</b> Oral Production Oral Comprehension Written Production Written Comprehension	<b style="color: red;">Beginner</b> 60% 60% 60% 60%	<b style="color: red;">Don't know</b> 40% 45% 40% 43%
<b>The most fundamental English language skills the future nurses should possess</b>	Listening Speaking Reading Writing	Listening Speaking Reading Writing
<b>Tasks commonly performed in English by undergraduate students in the nursing programs:</b> Reading academic texts (textbooks, reports, etc.) Listening to presentations given in English Giving oral presentations	80% 30% 20%	81% 34% 33%

## Phase II: Interim Results

**-Both groups seem to agree on the ‘importance’ of English language for students’ future career**

**-The participants’ optional comments support the quantitative results (discrepancy between the students and their directors/supervisors’ with respect to students’ English language ‘needs’ and with respect to ‘what should be done’):**

- The program directors favor the screening of the candidates at the time of admission whereas the students prefer remedial courses or content courses in English**
- Several directors commented that English language training as part of the program is not realistic, they suggest the students be screened at the time of admission particularly for Reading and writing skills.**
- They suggest any English language training should take place outside of the program as condition for entering the program**

## Phase II: Interim Results

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- **The students in their optional comments have overwhelmingly reiterated the need for English language proficiency courses; they suggest:**
  - **Subject specific courses in English**
  - **Practicums offered 100% in English**
  - **Courses dedicated to vocabulary for nursing**
  - **Obligatory workshops in English**
  - **Requiring written reports in English**
  - **Requiring standardized test score as a condition for graduation**
  - **Establishing obligatory exchange programs with anglophone universities**

## Discussion

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**In general the results of the study so far point to:**

- **A lack of reliable information with respect to nursing students' English language proficiency level in francophone universities**
- **The lack of a consistent measurement tool to evaluate the language proficiency level of applicants to nursing programs at the time of admission**
- **A confusion on the part of the stakeholders with respect to ability areas that need to be prioritized in undergraduate nursing programs**



## Discussion:

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- **A lack of mutual understanding between the universities and the nursing programs with respect to language admission criteria for these programs**
- **A reluctance on the part of program administrators to adjust the program content in order to address the language issue**

## Conclusion

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- **English language training and assessment practices in undergraduate nursing programs need to be adjusted to meet the English language needs of the graduating nurses;**
- **More specifically, the tasks and constructs required by RNAs, need to be highlighted and incorporated into the undergraduate nursing curriculum**

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