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The Medical Staff Awareness of the Importance of Implementing an ESP Course for Medical Students

The Case of Subject Teachers at the Department of Medicine at Mouloud Maameri University-Tizi Ouzou-

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Abstract:

English has gained an important position among languages of the world because of the scientific and economic development of the English speaking countries. It is becoming obvious that keeping abreast with science and technology through reading the recent published works requires a good control over English. It is, also, acknowledged that participating in international events like conferences requires this language since the majority of these conferences are conducted in English. In the Algerian university, the lack of ESP courses, in many departments, is seen as an obstacle in front of good achievement. Medical students at the University of Tizi Ouzou show an eager need to learn the language but the absence of a course and trained teachers in ESP remains a gap in front of satisfying their needs. This study aims at shedding light on the conditions under which an ESP course is conducted and highlighting its importance for medical students. It aims, also, at searching for the different reasons that lead to unsuccessful achievement and the students' difficulties when faced with materials of their specialty written in English. For

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this purpose, it seems necessary to briefly review the relevant literature related to the field of ESP. Since our study falls under the frame of quantitative studies whose aim is to present pictures of the group under investigation, the descriptive statistical method seems to be adequate relying on the questionnaire as a data collection tool. The questionnaire is addressed to subject specialists, i.e. doctors who are at the same time teachers at the Department of Medicine. They are experienced teachers who were one day students and are aware of the significance of English in their field. The results are analyzed using percentage and histograms. Open-ended questions are approached through small comments summarizing the respondents' propositions.

Keywords: Course Design, English for Specific Purposes, Needs Analysis

1. INTRODUCTION

It goes without saying that English has gained a significant position among languages of the world. After the development of many English speaking countries in fields like science and technology, this language started to attract the attention of many learners of different social and educational classes. These learners show an eager need to learn the language and have control over it in order to keep abreast with the recent developments. The medical professionals see it necessary to acquire a good control over this language since much of the scientific literature is being published in English. In fact, Success in either academic or professional settings is quite linked to the ability to speak English, write in English and read a large proportion of documents written in English.

The majority of students, at the Algerian university, don't discover the significance of English at an early point. They realize its importance during their graduation when they are faced with documents of their specialty that are written in English to write their theses or research papers. The major problem is that the majority of them are not able to read documents related to their majors, nor interact correctly or understand the English language in general and

the scientific discourse in particular. Hence, they lean toward reading French or Arabic written documents that, in most of the time, don't fulfill their requirements.

In fact, ESP teaching is regarded as a difficult endeavor because to its multi-disciplinary nature, which includes syllabus and course design, materials development, teaching, assessing, and evaluating. As a result, a vast amount of material has arisen to assist and advise ESP practitioners in making ESP courses more efficient and responsive to global trends. Thus, the current study effort calls into question the efficacy of ESP teaching in Algerian universities, and attempts to reduce the barriers as a start toward improving ESP teaching in Algerian universities and aiding the knowledge society building process.

1. 1. Aims of the Study

The purpose of this study is to look into the ESP situation at Department of Medicine at Mouloud Maameri University in order to identify medical students' needs, sort out teaching inconsistencies, and determine the most important elements in designing a consistent ESP course that meets both students' aspirations and the requirements of the newly-emerging knowledge society. Therefore, the purpose of this research is:

- To highlight the value and necessity of ESP courses in the medical profession, and identify target students' needs and expectations.
- To uncover the sources of inconsistency in ESP teaching and learning.

To attain the objectives of our research work, three questions need to be highlighted:

- ✓ What do medical students need English for?
- ✓ What are the teaching/learning barriers that hinder successful teaching and learning?
- ✓ What are the components of a well-rounded ESP program?

1.2. Hypotheses

We hypothesize that:

- To stay up with the newest scientific discoveries, medical doctors must first improve their reading abilities so that they can access medical material via the internet or books. These materials would be beneficial for students as well.

- Many factors are inhibiting the teaching/ earning process like learners' attitudes and administrative acts.

1.3. Methodology

1.3.1. choice of the Method

The descriptive method seems to be adequate in order to explore the actual situation of ESP teaching and learning at the department of medicine. It will permit us to obtain detailed data regarding the situation of English use in the Algerian medical departments. It helps to explore subject teachers' opinions about the introduction of an ESP course in the above mentioned department

1.3.2. Population

To obtain information regarding the importance of implementing an ESP course for medical students, we will deal with the following population:

- Subject specialists: these are teachers of medicine at the department of medicine. These teachers were in the past students and it seems that their opinion about the importance of implementing an ESP course will be useful since they are more aware of the significance of English in their field.

1.3.3. Data Collection Tools

To answer the research questions, quantitative data from teachers' questionnaires will be collected. The questionnaire is used as the main source of data and seems to be the most appropriate tool for many considerations like the large number of the population under study, its guarantee of the respondents' anonymity, and the short period of time if compared to the interview. The questionnaire will be

distributed randomly to teachers. Ten (10) questionnaires out of fifteen (15) have been returned.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Defining ESP

Many scholars like Strevens[1], Hutchinson and Waters[2] and Robinson[3] are of the view that ESP cannot be given a universally applicable definition. It is a term that arose in the 60's when General English courses could not fulfill the requirements of learners and employees. Its growth was a result of the rapid domination of English in science, technology, business and publishing. ESP is that kind of language teaching and learning that is built upon what has been acquired in general English with more focus

ESP is a term that arose in the 60's to fulfill the needs of learners that General English courses could not satisfy. Its growth went hand in hand with the growing domination of English in science, technology, business, and publishing. In fact, ESP is that branch of linguistics that relates the teaching/learning process to learners' needs. It is that kind of language that is built upon what has been learnt in General English with more focus on the requirements of given domain, vocation or occupation.

Mackey and Mountford[4] consider ESP as that language needed for a 'clearly utilitarian purpose'. The purpose they refer to relates to learners' needs in different settings that can be occupational, vocational, academic or professional study like medicine. ESP, for them, is that part of language needed to fulfill the requirements of specific settings by particular participants who are usually adults.

(1) ESP after twenty years: A re-appraisal (1988). In Tickoo, M. *ESP: State of the Art* (1-13). Singapore: SEAMEO Regional Centre.
(2) *English for Specific Purposes*: *A Learning Centered Approach (1987)*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
(3) *ESP Today: a Practitioner's Guide (1991).* Hemel Hempstead: Prentice Hall international
(4) *English for Specific Purposes*: *A Case Study Approach (1978)*. London: Longman. (p2)

They focus on adults because adults are more aware and conscious of the reasons behind learning English. They need this language to further their knowledge in their field of study or work, or to perform a social role.

They[1] also make a distinction between the notion of 'special language' and 'special purposes'. The notion of 'special language' refers to a restricted repertoire of words or expressions that have been chosen from the whole language to fulfill the requirements of a given context. 'Special purpose' represents the aim behind which the learners seek to learn the language and not on the specific jargon or register they learn.

For Hutchinson and Waters[2], ESP is an approach. It is that kind of language teaching in which the content and the method are based on learners' reasons for learning. They see that an ESP course should answer the question: why does this learner need to learn a foreign language? Answering this question requires gathering data about the learners, the language needed and the context in which the teaching/learning process will take place. These scholars[3] tend to define ESP by highlighting what ESP is not rather than showing what ESP is. They claim that ESP is far from being a 'specialized variety' of English with a repertoire of words and expressions that are destined to learners of a given field. It is obvious that there some features that are related and typical in a given context, but ESP 'should properly be seen not as any particular language product but as an approach to language teaching which is directed by specific and apparent reasons for learning'.[4]

2.2 Needs Analysis

Designing an ESP course requires a good starting. Needs analysis is a process that focuses on understanding students' needs. According

(1) *Ibid*., pp 4-5
(2) Op.cit
(3) *Ibid*, pp 18-19
(4) *Ibid*., p 19

to Hamp-lyons[1], ESP is a process that takes into consideration the learner and the situation. He claims that a good starting point in designing an ESP course starts with understanding students' needs. Indeed, students are considered as a source of information and teachers who ignore their students' interests and what they already know about the subject matter will find it difficult to fulfil their students' needs.

2.2.1. Implications of Needs Analysis

Needs Analysis is a prerequisite process in any educational institution. It is significant in the sense that it provides a clear image about the requirements of a given group of learners in a specific learning context. An ongoing needs analysis should be carried at the beginning of any course design to guarantee effective outcomes. In fact, an ongoing and renewable needs assessment is required for any educational institution, since academic needs of administrators and educators, and students change and vary across time. In addition, many educators rely on their perceived academic needs to highlight their students' felt needs. Therefore, more objective needs analysis is required for a better instructional achievement. Another significant point about carrying needs analysis is that educators can use the outcomes of this process to place learners in homogenous classes in order to help teachers plan and provide language content relevant to learners' proficiency level.

3. Results of the Study

3. 1. Teachers' Questionnaire

The first two questions are informative. They shed light on the period of time subject teachers have experienced in the medical profession and at the Department of Medicine. Teachers' answers reveal that most of them have experienced the medical profession

(1)). The Cambridge Guide to Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (1991). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. In Ouniss, S. (2005). *An Attempt to Identify Students' Needs in Learning English for Specific Purposes.* Batna: Hadj Lakhder University.

before becoming teachers at the department of medicine.

Q. 3. Do you use English in your daily life?

	N	%
Yes	1	10%
No	9	90%
Total	10	100%

Table 1: Subject teachers' use of English in their daily life

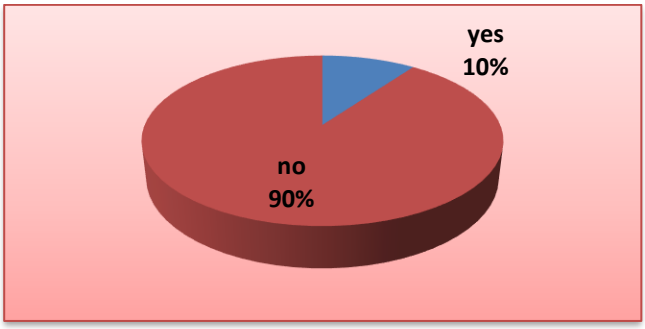

Figure 1: Subject teachers' use of English in their daily life

The results show that the majority (90%) of teachers don't use English in their daily life. This may due to the influence of French on those teachers who carried their studies and career in this language.

Q. 4. Do you think that English is important in your field?

	N	%
Yes	10	100%
No	0	00%
Total	10	100%

Table 2: the importance of English in the field of medicine

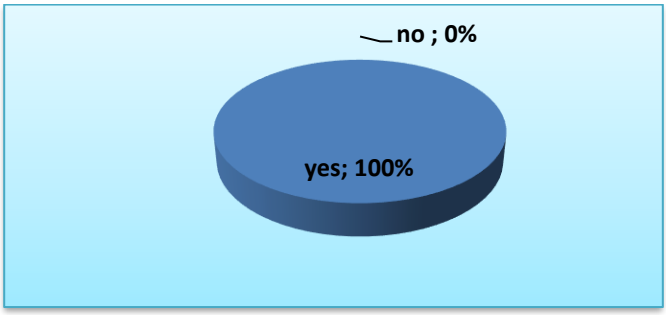

Figure 2: the importance of English in the field of medicine

This question aims at finding out whether or not subject teachers are aware of the role of English language in their field of specialty. In fact none of the informants denied the importance of English in their field. All of them have answered positively to this question.

Q. 5. If yes, please specify

- It is the language of science
- It is the universal language.
- Much of the scientific articles are published in English.
- Almost all the websites are in English.
- International conferences are held in English

Q. 6. Do you face difficulties when reading documents, of your specialty, that are written in English?

	N	%
Yes	10	100%
No	0	00%
Total	10	100%

Table 3: difficulties of Subject teachers with English

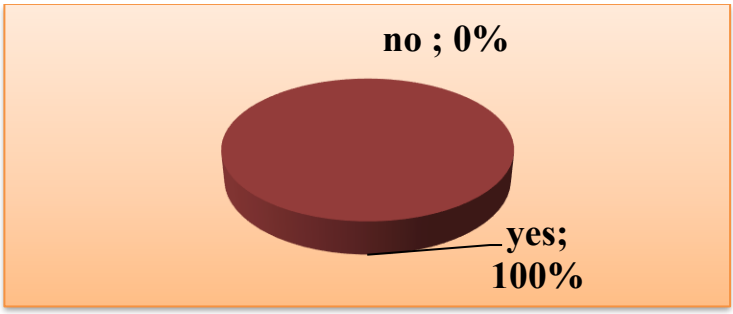

Figure 3: difficulties of Subject teachers with English

According to the results shown in figure 3, it seems that all the teachers find it difficult when exposed to materials of their specialty that are written in English. When asked in Q7 about the difficulties they encounter, they answered:

- I don't know some words of my specialty in English.

- I understand vocabulary but I don't grasp the whole meaning of the expression.

- I understand the whole paragraph but when it comes to details I can't get them.

Q. 8. As a subject teacher, do you think that English is much more used to :

Areas in which English is used	N	%
Read medical documents	10	100%
Do research	4	40%
Participate and attend conferences	9	90%
Write medical articles	9	90%

Table 4: teachers' opinions about the area in which English is needed

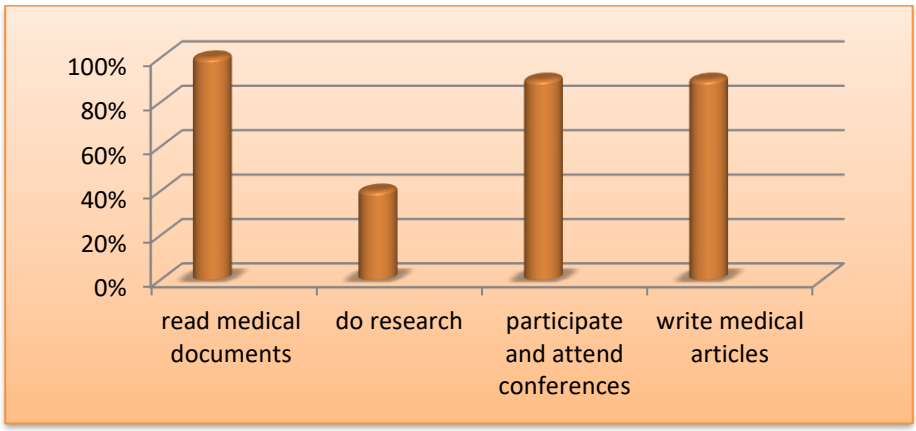

Figure 4: teachers' opinions about the area in which English is needed

Figure 4 indicates clearly that all the subject teachers (100%) need English to read medical documentation, followed by participation in conferences and writing medical articles. Doing research got (40 %). They may use French to deal with research.

Q. 9. Would you classify the following skills according to their importance in your field

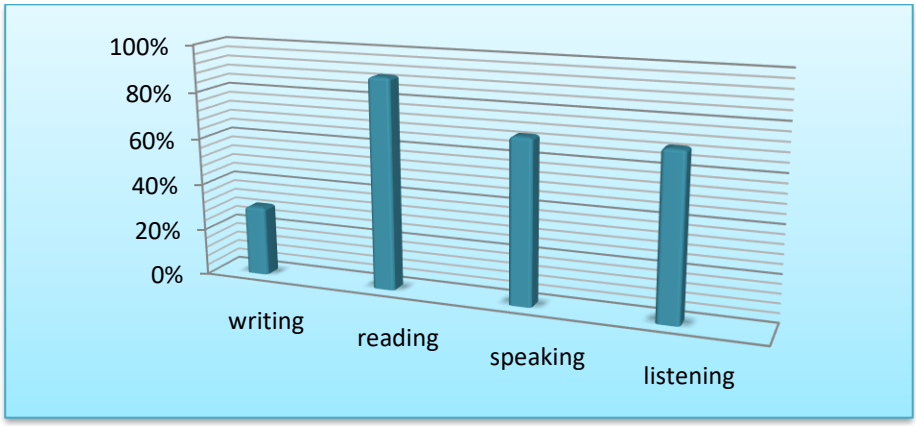

Figure 5: classification of skills according to their importance

The results show that reading is the most needed skill in the medical trend then comes speaking and listening in second position. The writing skill is classified the last.

Q. 10. Do you think that the time allocated to the ESP course is

	N	%
enough	0	00%
Not enough	10	100%
Total	10	100%

Table 5: Time allocation and teachers' opinions

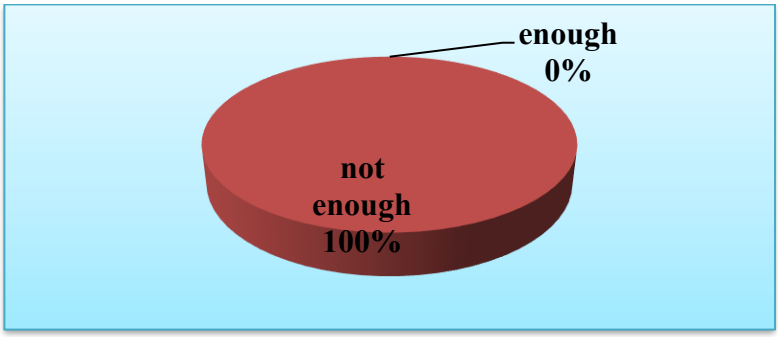

Figure 6: Time allocation and teachers' opinions

All the respondents (100%) to this question see that the time provided for ESP is not enough to cover the requirements of medical students in their field.

Q.11. Are the teachers of English at the department of medicine specialists in ESP?

	N	%
yes	0	00%
No	10	100%
Total	10	100%

Table 6: Teachers of English at the department of medicine

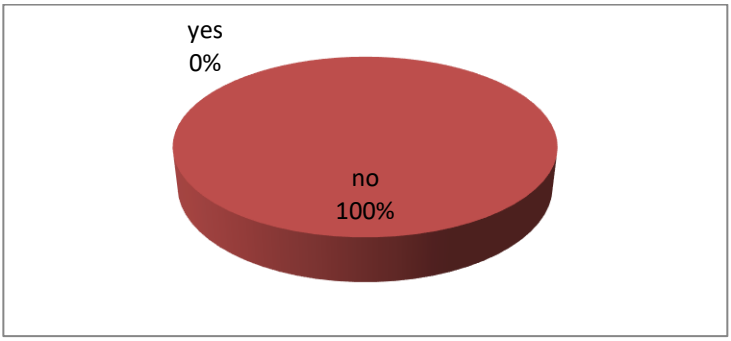

Figure 7: Teachers of English at the department of medicine

All the respondents to this question agree on the point that the teachers of English at the department of medicine are not trained in ESP. Indeed, many teachers of English in the Algerian university are newly graduated and work in different departments as part-time teachers.

Q.12. Do you think that these teachers use materials or a course designed for medicine students?

	N	%
yes	0	00%
No	10	100%
Total	10	100%

Table 7: the course used by the teachers of English

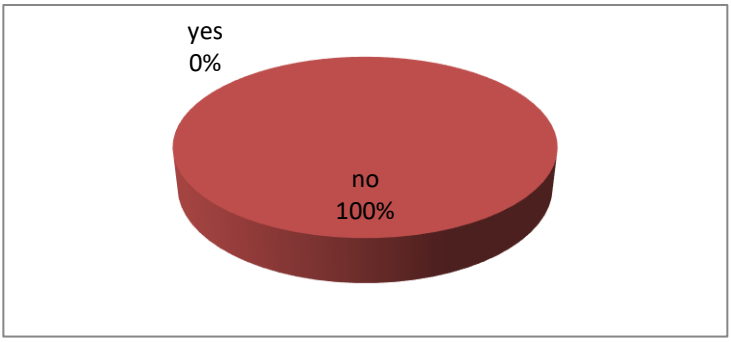

Figure 8: the course used by the teachers of English

According to the respondents, teachers of English do not use any kind of materials designed for medicine students. In fact, teachers of ESP in different departments rely on materials they choose themselves and think they are adequate for a given specialty. These courses and materials are not based on any kind of needs analysis.

Q.13. Have you any suggestions concerning the content of the ESP course?

- The implementation of a specific course designed for the medical specialty.

- provide more time for the English session

3. 2. Findings and Analysis

After the tabulations have been commented, it seems adequate to analyze the results according to subject teachers' answers. These teachers recognize the vital role of English and its significance as a medium towards the exploitation of new scientific publications.They consider it important because they know it is the language of the world and need it much more to read recent scientific articles written in English and even if they want to participate in international conferences, an Algerian doctor needs to write his article in English.

The most important data that emerged from the results indicated that medical staff are poor manipulators of the English language and suffer significant difficulties in gaining the essential information and the necessary knowledge. They say, however, that command of this language is synonymous with carrier advancement and scientific progress. As a result, they have a good attitude toward the language and advocate for its formal inclusion in the Department of Medicine because it serves as a facilitator in both academic and professional life.

In fact, and according to the results, teachers find it difficult to understand materials of their specialty that are written in English. Some find it difficult to understand the whole meaning of the

sentence, others don't understand vocabulary. Hence, they think that the course to be designed requires much more reading on the expense of other skills, even though the other three skills are important.

It is also revealed, according to medical staff answers, that ESP teachers at the medicine department lack knowledge concerning ESP teaching/ learning. They are not trained to deal with such a kind of teaching, and do not take learners' needs into consideration as a basis of the course. However, they are free to teach whatever they see adequate and most of the time they select materials, related to the field, and think they are adequate. As a result, one of the key elements that lead to failure to achieve the desired outcomes is the lack of training.

Another significant stumbling block to better performance has been time management. In fact, the more time spent teaching a course, the better the learner's exposure to the language will be. However, it has been observed that the amount of time spent on the English course is insufficient to achieve the desired level and outcomes. This would influence students' enthusiasm for the course and lead them lean toward other courses with higher time allocation and coefficient.

4. Implications

The subject of the present paper is an overview of the main problems connected with teaching ESP at the university level with special emphasis on the department of medical sciences at the University of Tizi Ouzou. Nowadays, it is still urgent to discuss what to teach and how to teach a foreign language taking into account the objective, academic and professional needs of our learners. Analysis of the questionnaire revealed the importance of implementing an ESP course that meets the requirements and exigencies of the new knowledge society. In fact, it is vital to work on preparing courses that would fulfil learners' needs and serve their requirements in the field of study. In addition, this study is considered as a stepping stone towards changing institutions attitudes toward English. This would be achieved through implementing an English course and provide more

time for the English sessions. Teachers of the specialty are also required to collaborate with the language teachers for better achievement.

5. CONCLUSION

The teaching of English, in our country, has been given a good piece of importance. It seems that our students and teachers are aware of the role English plays in many domains. It is becoming obvious that keeping abreast with the scientific development and interacting effectively with other countries in domains of trade and international commerce requires a good level in this language.

In the same line of thought, the Algerian doctors need the English language to reinforce their position in the international scientific and medical network. They need to read recently published scientific texts and articles in order to keep in touch with foreign colleagues. Hence, more attention needs to be given to the teaching of this language. Despite this fact, English instruction is not given its share of attention in the Department of medicine at the University of Tizi-Ouzou.

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Appendix 1: Teachers' Questionnaire

1- How long have you been working in the medical profession?

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2- How long have you been teaching at the department of medicine?

……

3- Do you use English in your daily life?

Yes No ☐ ☐

4- Do you think that English is important in your field?

Yes No ☐ ☐

5- If yes, please specify.

……

6- Do you face difficulties when reading documents of your specialty that are written in English?

Yes No ☐ ☐

7- If yes, what are the difficulties that you encounter?

……

8- As a subject teacher, do you think that English is much more used to

- Read medical documentation ☐
- Do research ☐
- Participate and attend conferences ☐
- Write medical articles ☐

9- Would you classify the following skills according to their importance in your field

- Writing ☐

- Reading ☐
- Speaking ☐
- Listening ☐

10- Do you think that the time allocated to the ESP course is

- Enough ☐
- Not enough ☐

11- Are the teachers of English at the department of medicine specialists in ESP?

12- Do you think that these teachers use materials or a course designed for medicine students?

13- Have you any suggestions concerning the content of the ESP course?

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