

Needs Analysis of English for Medical Purposes: Students' Perceptions

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Abstract :

Recently, English has been integrated into Algerian higher education where English is not the official language of instruction and teaching practices in many fields. For medical students, English is taught within the English for Specific Purposes (ESP) context. To enquire about whether the English taught is relevant to the learners' needs, needs analysis is required. The present study aims to explore the English needs of third year medical students at faculty of medicine, University of Bejaia. To collect data, the study used a questionnaire to analyze the medical students' perceptions towards the importance of learning English as well as their language learning needs with regards to the major (macro) language skills; reading, writing, listening, and speaking, and the micro skills as well. Data was analyzed quantitatively. The results of the study revealed that all third-year medical students at faculty of medicine, University of Bejaia agreed on the importance of English and its use in their field of study. Moreover, the findings revealed that the majority of the participant medical students perceive speaking skill as the most important skill, followed by listening, reading, and writing. The study also indicated that medical students are aware of the different relevant micro skills needs in their specific domain. The study results might be helpful to teachers of ESP teaching medical students.

Keywords: English for Medical Purposes (EMP); English for Specific Purposes (ESP); Medical students; Needs Analysis; Perceptions.

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1. Introduction

In the nowadays globalized world, being an international language for communication and a lingua franca for science, technology, education, business, and tourism, English proficiency becomes fundamental and a vehicle for the world's several global transactions. Despite of the existence of other international languages in the world, English has gained its place with its central role in education all over the world (Lodhi et al., 2018). The need to use English in different fields and domains has led to the rapid increase in the teaching and learning of ESP in order to meet the learners' specific academic and professional needs as well.

ESP is generally referred to as being an approach to teaching English (as a second or foreign language) to learners with specific needs, goals, and interests so as to use it in specific academic or professional settings. It targets students' needs in specific contexts and areas of enquiry through conducting prior analysis of their needs, which will help in taking appropriate and relevant decisions towards the teaching/learning process (Dudley-Evans & John 1998; Nunan, 2004).

Given the importance of English and its crucial position in most world professions, world companies and organizations generally require English language mastery from job seekers (Hounnou, 2023). Therefore, individuals' competence in speaking specific English in addition to general English (GE) provide more professional opportunities and opens doors for more opportunities around the world. In this regard, Hounnou (2023) argued that being proficient in specific English plays an important role in job opportunity. That is, learning specific English provides people with more chances and makes it easier for them to get a profession in the desired field.

Interestingly, English has been introduced into the medical educational programme in higher education in many countries around the world where English is not the official language of instruction. English instruction in such cases aims at teaching and familiarizing common English terminologies used in the medical field to help medical students get access to most information resources which are mainly available in English (medical textbooks and articles, professional journals, documents, etc.). Thus, for Algerian medical students who receive their instruction in a language other than English (French in the case of Algeria), they study English as a compulsory subject in their program during their University Journey.

Accordingly, the present study aims at exploring and finding out about medical students' English language needs. Thus, the current study aims to answer the following research questions:

Question 1: What are the medical students' attitudes towards the importance of learning English?

Question 2: What are the medical students' needs with regards to the major language skills; reading, writing, listening, and speaking (macro and micro skills)?

2. What is ESP?

The origin of ESP can be linked to the interests and goals of people to learn English in different specific contexts and disciplines, such as: medical English, English for law, English for hotel Industry, etc. (Djelloul, 2019).

Defining ESP has proven to be problematic to researchers, thus, through time, scholars attempted various definitions of ESP. However, all these scholars agree that ESP is an approach to English instruction focusing and prioritizing the learners' needs and goals of learning. It is described as English instruction devoted for particular group of students with particular needs for the purpose of using it in their domains or fields of interest. Moreover, ESP with its specific characteristics is considered as an approach to the teaching and learning of English by taking into account the learners' wants and goals of learning, which will allow the use and practice of English proficiency for professional or vocational purposes.

ESP, as opposed to other types of English instruction focuses on why the learners want to learn English. Thus, in ESP, it is the prior analysis of the learners' needs that determines the decisions to be taken as to the teaching and learning process (Mackay and Mountford, 1978; Hutchinson & Waters, 1987, Munby; 1981, Anthony, 1997; Basturkmen, 2006). An example of this is the decisions about the content to teach and present to the learners (syllabus), materials to use, and the method to adopt. This reflects the importance and concern ESP shows towards the learner's needs and goals of learning.

According to Otilia (2015), ESP is English instruction based on the learners' specific needs which aims to meet and fulfill their needs in learning English for the purpose of using it in their specific domains such as tourism, science, technology, medicine, law, etc. Moreover, it is worth mentioning that according to Otilia (2015), there are two main characteristics of ESP on which

most researchers agree on; 1) ESP is specific to contexts and is tailored according to those contexts; and 2) ESP is oriented to fulfill the learners' particular requirements. That is to say, ESP is based on particular areas of inquiry and is tailored to address the learners' specific fields' related knowledge.

Furthermore, Stern (1992) addressed the teaching objectives of ESP and mainly explained how ESP contributes to help learners acquire language proficiency in addition to the ability to easily adapt to new situations.

The aim of ESP, thus, is to provide learners with the necessary specific English language skills to help them participate effectively in specific contexts with regards to their future professions and areas of specialty.

3. EGP, ESP, and EMP

GE (or English for General Purposes, EGP) refers to the people's daily or common usage of the English language in the different common life situations. Most of the students in many Universities are taught GE where their interests, needs and goals are not taken into consideration by the authorities, which led to learning failures among students. Awareness of such issues in language learning led to the appearance of ESP as a key solution for such educational issues. Moreover, the literature shows that unlike GE, ESP is related to the actual needs and goals of the learners who are given the opportunity to practise authentic language tailored to their actual needs and future professional lives as well. Therefore, ESP is more relevant than GE (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987; Johns, 2013). Accordingly, the aim of ESP is to help language learners develop the competencies needed for use in a specific discipline or occupation.

Through time, the different reasons of the rapidly growing technological world resulted in emergence of new and different ESP branches. Due to the position English has gained in the world as the international language of science and medicine, a significant body of medical research has been produced in English which, consequently set the stage for the emergence of a new ESP branch known as EMP (English for Medical Purposes), as a necessity for health sector (Kayaoğlu & Akbaş, 2016). The basic aim of EMP is to help learners be competent while communicating in English within the field of medicine or medical professions. This was supported by Master (2005) who reported that the basic focus of the EMP research is mainly improving skills in professional communication. Moreover, Ferguson (2013) stated that written medical

documents with their different types are of importance in the EMP research. In other words, medical documents are also a type of medical resources which is considered and taken into account in the EMP research.

4. Methodology

4.1. Method and Study Design:

The present study is a descriptive case study, it aims to explore the perceptions of third year medical students with regards to the importance of learning English. Moreover, the study aims at finding out the learners' English needs with regards to the four language skills at the macro and micro levels.

Therefore, to explore the mentioned issue, we relied on an exploratory design to obtain the needed data. To that end, we adopted a quantitative methodology (questionnaire) to analyze the obtained data.

4.2. Population and Sample:

The population of the current study consists of medical students at the faculty of medicine, University of Bejaia. The questionnaire was distributed to a random sample of 35 students including males and females who voluntarily accepted to participate in the study.

4.3. Data collection and analysis:

In order to collect data, the researcher asked for permission from the faculty of medicine at Bejaia University. 35 questionnaires were distributed to the faculty medical students who voluntarily participated in the study. It took about 15 minutes to get back the questionnaires from the participants. Data were then analyzed using frequencies and percentages.

5. Results

Table N° 1. Importance of English for Medical Students

Importance of English	Percentage
Yes	100%
No	0%

Table 1 above presents students' perceptions towards the importance of English in their field of study. The results indicated that all the participant medical students perceived English as an important course to be included in their studies.

Table N°2. Students' Purpose of Learning English

Students' purpose of learning English	Percentage
Read medical articles	28.57%
Write medical articles	11.43%
Interact with other people	8.57%
Use it in my future career	37.14%
Study other subjects	14.29%

Table 2 presents students' purpose of learning English, the findings revealed that the most important purpose of learning English as perceived by the majority of medical students (37.14%) was *use it in my future career*, followed by *read medical articles* (28.57%), then, *study other subjects* (14.29%), followed by *write medical articles* (11.43%), and finally *interact with other people* (8.57%).

Table N°3. Students' Most Needed English Macro Skills

Skill	Percentage
Speaking	42.86%
Listening	28.57%
Writing	11.43%
Reading	17.14%

Table 3 presents students' perceptions towards the most needed English skill. The results indicated that *speaking skill* was the most needed skill as perceived by the majority of students (42.86%), followed by *listening skill* (28.57%), *reading skill* (17.14%), and, finally, *writing skill* (11.43%).

Table N° 4. Students' Perceptions towards Reading Micro Skills

Reading	Percentage
Read general books	14.29%
Read course handouts in my field	14.29%
Read manuals about my studies	17.14%
Read medical books	54.28%

Table 4 above shows the students' perceptions towards the reading micro skills. The results showed that *read medical books* has been found the top one micro skill as perceived by the majority of the respondents (54.28%). This was followed by *read manuals about my studies* (17.14%), then, followed by *read course handouts in my field* and *read general books*, both with the same percentage (14.29%).

Table N°5. Students' Perceptions towards Writing Micro Skills

Writing	Percentage
Write medical articles and research papers	22.86%
Take notes from several spoken sources	57.14%
Writing projects	20%

Table 5 presents students' perceptions towards the writing micro skills. The findings revealed that the majority of the participants (57.14%) considered *take notes from several spoken sources* to be the most significant writing micro skill. Less than half of the participants (22.86%) considered *write medical articles and research papers* as the most important writing micro skill. Nevertheless, the remaining students (20%) considered *writing projects* as the most important writing sub-skill.

Table N°6. Students' Perceptions towards Listening Micro Skills

Listening	Percentage
Listen to lectures and other spoken sources	34.28%
Listen to oral presentations	22.86%
Listen to medical audio and video sources	42.86%

The above table represents students' perceptions towards the listening micro skills. The results indicated that *listen to medical audio and video sources* has been found to be the most significant listening sub-skill by most of the students (42.86%). The second important listening sub-skill as perceived by the participants was *listen to lectures and other spoken sources* (34.28%). Finally, the rest of the respondents (22.86%) considered *listen to oral presentations* as the most important sub-skill for them,

Table N°7. Students' Perceptions towards Speaking Micro Skills

Speaking	Percentage
Interact with people	14.29%
Give oral presentations	57.14%
Discuss on medical issues in seminars and conferences	28.57%

Table 7 presents students' perceptions towards the speaking micro skills. The results revealed that *give oral presentations* in English has been found to be the most significant speaking micro skill as perceived by most of the medical students (57.14%). *Discuss on medical issues in seminars and conferences* has been found to be the second important speaking micro skill as perceived by 28.57% of the respondents. Finally, the remaining students (14.29%) considered *interact with people* in English as the most important speaking micro skill.

6. Discussion

The current section summarizes the results obtained through the questionnaire; hence, it provides answers to the study research questions. Interestingly, the present study aimed at exploring medical students' perceptions towards their importance of learning English. It also aimed at finding out about the learners' needs as far as the four language skills are concerned at both macro and micro levels.

With regards to the first research question which addresses the medical students' perceptions towards the importance of learning English, the findings of the study showed that all the participant medical students (100%) agreed that English is important for their field of study. This might be due to the fact that several sources of information (books, articles, journals, etc.) in the medical field are available in English. Moreover, most of the participants revealed that they need English for the purpose of using it in their future careers, and to read medical articles as well. This result is in line with Rinawati et al. (2022) who found that using English in future career was the most important purpose of learning English by first year medical students at Sultan Agung Islamic University. This finding is also similar to Wahyuni's (2021) study that indicated that most of the medical students' purpose of learning English is for their medical studies and future medical professional career.

As for the second research question which attempts to find out about the learners' needs with regards to the four language skills (speaking, listening, reading, and writing) at both macro and micro levels, the findings indicated that with regards to the macro skills needs, it has been found that the majority of the respondents (42.86%) indicated that speaking skill is the skill they need the most in studying English, implying that the medical students believe that they will mostly need to speak in English in the future maybe because speaking skill is among the most difficult skills to be developed. This result correlates with Miščin's (2018), and Rinawati et al.'s (2022) studies that found that speaking skill is perceived to be the most significant skill by medical students.

Importantly concerning the participants' responses of their perceptions towards the micro skills needs, the study revealed that most medical students (54.28%) perceive reading medical books as the most important reading sub-skill. This finding is in line with Çelik's (2018) finding that the participant medical students perceived reading medical books as the most significant reading sub-skill. This reflects the importance and the position English occupies in the medical field. Taking notes from several spoken sources has been found to be the most significant writing sub-skill by the majority (57.14%) of the respondents. This indicates that the participant medical students are more interested in acquiring the ability to write down notes in English, and this may be because their medical information books as well as their different sources of information in their field of study are mostly in English, hence, they need to regularly take notes so that to retain and recall information when necessary. This is further confirmed by Kurfurst (2004) who stated that command of English language is important for medical professionals since the majority of relevant medical information is available mainly in English. Concerning the listening sub-skills, the overwhelming majority (42.86%) of the respondents perceived listening to medical audio and video sources as the most important sub-skill. This result is in line with Kayaoğlu and Akbaş' (2016) finding that listening to medical audio and video sources has been found to be the most important listening sub-skill for the Turkish medical student participants. Moreover, this result is similar to the participants' preference in the writing sub-skill where they showed preference for taking notes from a variety of spoken sources, implying that the participants are aware of the importance and the need for several medical sources including both audio and video sources available in English which will be of considerable help for their field of study. Finally, for the speaking sub-skills, the results revealed

that most medical students (57.14%) perceived giving oral presentations as the most important reading sub-skill. This result correlates with the findings of Rinawati et al.'s (2022) study which reported that the participant medical students perceived giving oral presentations as the most important speaking sub-skill.

7. Recommendations and Suggestions

Based on the study's results, the following recommendations can be drawn:

- English for Medical Purposes (EMP) needs to be offered as a compulsory course for medical students from early University years, focusing on relevant related terminology. This can be realized by first analyzing the medical students' needs.
- An EMP course needs to focus more on communication skills, yet, all language skills need to be integrated in the course and the learners should be aware of the importance of each language skill.
- Regularly organize EMP study days for medical students to give them space to freely express their English language needs, lacks, and challenges.
- Develop an EMP course based on rigorous and consistent needs analysis which is important for an effective and a successful EMP course.

8. Conclusion

The chief goal of his study was to investigate the English language needs of medical students to inform and help course designers and stakeholders to develop appropriate and effective ESP course so as to fulfill the needs of medical learners. To this end, a questionnaire was administered to 35 volunteer third year medical students.

The results of the present study indicated that third year medical students at Bejaia University have positive attitudes and perceptions towards learning English and perceive learning English as an important subject in their field of study. Moreover, the findings showed that the medical students' most significant purpose of learning English is for its use in their future careers and for reading medical articles as well.

Furthermore, with regards to the language macro skills needs, the study showed that the participant medical students consider speaking skill to be the most significant macro skill, followed by listening, reading and writing. As for the micro skills needs, *read medical books* has been found to be the most important

reading sub-skill, *take notes from several spoken sources* to be the most important writing sub-skill, *listen to medical audio and video sources* to be the most important listening sub-skill, and *give oral presentations* to be the most important speaking sub-skill.

Therefore, designing a specific English course based on the students' needs analysis is essential as it would bridge the gap between the learners' area of inquiry related knowledge and their English proficiency.

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