

## **Towards Teaching English for Medical Purposes at the Intensive Language Teaching Center of Mostaganem**

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**Abstract:** *Among the richest and most influential areas in language research is the field of English for Specific Purposes (ESP henceforth). It is based on perspectives into learners' language learning needs which can be adequately measured through needs analysis. Many students at the Intensive Language Teaching Center of Mostaganem come to learn English for many purposes: travelling, business, communicating with English native speakers, studies, understanding movies, leisure and for medical purposes. Medical English is a subject-content area that is taught from medicine and health care perspective on one hand while stressing vocabulary acquisition, grammar, and structure on the other hand. For this reason, this paper aims to identify learners' needs towards studying English at the center and attempt to design a course to meet their needs. Through analyzing their specific needs, we found that most medical learners had a strong desire to learn English that enables them to publish medical articles, participate in international conferences, and communicate with people who belong to the same community of practice. Besides, they were more motivated to acquire and use the language within their field of interest. Therefore, a course design is planned accordingly.*

**Key words:** ESP, needs analysis, medical English, course design.

## ***1. Introduction***

Since 1960s, studies on English for Specific Purposes (ESP) have been proliferating and have in due course come to be of paramount importance in English Language Teaching (ELT) (Hutchinson and Waters, 1987). In essence, ESP is a part of General English Language (GEL) which stresses authentic results of an ESP course (Dudley-Evans and St. John, 1998; Hutchinson and Waters, 1987). ESP can also be considered as a methodology which has generally broadened after World War II, and in the meantime, the English language has become worldwide the principal means of international communications in science, business, education, and medicine (Hutchinson and Waters, 1987). After the Second World War, the outstandingly immense scientific and economic development was primarily controlled by the English-speaking United States of America. Second, the colossal discoveries and the crisis of oil in the 1970s of the twentieth century have set up new ways of relationship between the West and the (Middle) East. The English language has been the major medium of this international communication. English language teaching educators have immediately designed new courses and adopted new methods to meet the various needs of the ESP learners (Hutchinson and Waters 1987, p. 7). Furthermore, English has also become a main means to global communication and is now the most important language of most printed publications. More than two-thirds of the world's professionals and scientists read in English; about eighty per cent of online information is in English; and about eighty per cent of the approximately 40 million of internet users communicate in English (Crystal, 1995; Graddol, 1997). Unfortunately there is a serious lack of research related to ESP in the Arab world.

## ***Definition***

In contrast to General English (GE), which normally deals with general topics, ESP focuses on specific topics and skills learners need in a particular subject area. English for specific purpose (ESP) stands for the teaching and learning of English as a second or foreign language, where the objective of the learners is to use English in a specific field or professional career. The teaching of English for specific purposes, in its early days, was largely stirred by the need to communicate across languages in areas such as commerce and technology. This has now expanded to include other areas such as English for academic purposes (EAP), English for occupational purposes (EOP), , English for business purposes (EBP), English for legal purposes (ELP) and English for medical purposes (EMP) (Belcher 2009) which is our main concern in this paper.

## ***Needs Analysis in ESP***

Needs Analysis (NA) is a requisite stage in designing ESP materials (Belcher, 2006). It is the stepping stone to categorize the course objective, and learners' communicative and linguistic needs. NA is defined differently by researchers, however, they all approve that NA reveals requirements, wants and needs of learners in their subject content field. Dudley-Evans and St John (1998, p.125) defined NA as "professional information about the learners: The tasks and activities learners are/will be using English for [...] target situation analysis and objective Needs" They also consider NA as the process through which personal needs are retrieved. Besides, they deemed NA as the process of reconsidering the learners' English language skill; finding activities linked to linguistic, genre, discourse; determining what is expected out of the course; and finally establishing how the course will be designed and run.

The paper seeks to answer the following questions:  
What are medical learners' needs towards studying English?  
How can a teacher design a course for medical English learners?

## ***2. Methodology***

In this discussion, I will propose certain steps that can be employed when designing an EMP course at the Intensive Language Teaching Center. A group of 10 learners, 6 medical students and 4 doctors were involved in the study. The instrument used in this study was a questionnaire given to learners to complete. The information helped the researcher develop the course design (80 hours). It consisted of 14 questions and took approximately 10 minutes to complete.

## ***3. Findings***

When analyzing the questionnaire, it was found that all learners are in need to learn English since they admitted the fact that it is very important in their work. Though they do not use at the workplace but they confirmed its significance when travelling abroad and meeting medical professionals. Besides, most recent medical research articles are in English. More importantly, they stressed their needs to write a report on a patient's pain, their curriculum vitae, to participate in Conferences and write medical research papers. They also need to focus on the four language skills.

## ***4. Discussion***

The steps to be taken into account in designing NA and selecting teaching materials are based on the Hutchinson and Waters (1987)

perspective in that it seeks to focus on learner-centeredness through improving students' communicative skills along with other linguistic abilities. However, students who came to the center were doctors and highly motivated to learn general English and medical English so as to communicate effectively at the workplace or different content-based contexts. They all possessed knowledge of French medical terminology which is very similar to English. Medical students were able to understand the meaning of some sentences but unable to produce coherent discourse; besides, they lacked fluency and accuracy and they had problems pronouncing different medical terms. Moreover, the teacher had an obstacle in teaching students with mixed abilities, all of them had different levels of proficiency.

After analyzing students' needs, a course is designed. This course is designed for pre-intermediate and intermediate medical learners who wish to strengthen their communication skills and the language they need at work. More specifically, the course is designed to help doctors and medical students develop their productive and receptive skills in English, namely, listening, speaking, writing and reading. It aims to give the participants the opportunity to learn specialized vocabulary and expressions to activate passive vocabulary and increase fluency and confidence in using English in professional contexts. It lasts for 20 weeks, 4 hours per week and requires small class size.

The courses include English for doctor-patient consultations ( presenting complaint through examination and diagnosis to treatment ; English for medical congresses ( listening to speakers presenting

short papers, posters, fielding questions,) ; English for report/ journal article writing (writing abstract, guidelines to scientific papers); focus on vocabulary (both academic and specific medical terminology). Moreover, EMP lessons are organized according to the combination of the main skills, i.e., the most selected and first-rated by the medical students in the needs analysis. Each module has instructional objectives that correspond to the skills needed to be developed.

The main goal of the EMP Course is to develop fluency and confidence in using English in medical contexts. EMP aims at increasing EFL medical students' familiarity with medical written language and discourse in different medical contexts. The focus is on carrying out specialized activities in English, but attention is given to reading comprehension skills (expanding English, general and medical vocabulary repertoire through extensive readings), academic and scientific writing skills, and technical medical terms as required.

The EMP course includes material drawn from a range of specialist resources, as well as up-to-date authentic materials. This course is carefully compiled from professional medical resources, current topical reports and journals, and pertinent proficient websites. The course incorporates web-based instruction through the EMP online website and the use of on-line sessions.

The course covers a broad range of topics which include:

1. Comprehending medical reading comprehension topics
2. Writing assignments

3. Medical terminology
4. Medical abbreviations

And of course, any course design consists of the teaching materials

5. Eric H. Glendinning and B. A. S Holmstorm, *English in Medicine*, Cambridge University Press, 2005.
6. Eric H. Glendinning and Ron Howard, *Professional English in Use, medicine*, Cambridge University Press, 2005.
7. Sam McCarter, *Oxford English for Careers in Medicine*, student's books, Oxford University Press, 2010.
8. [www.englishmed.com](http://www.englishmed.com); [www.netdoctor.co.uk](http://www.netdoctor.co.uk) ;  
[www.netdoctor.co.uk](http://www.netdoctor.co.uk) ; [www.lycos.com](http://www.lycos.com) ; [www.ama-assn.org/insight](http://www.ama-assn.org/insight); [www.caringonline.com](http://www.caringonline.com)  
[www.healthideas.com](http://www.healthideas.com)

By the end of this course, learners should be able to:

1. Comprehend written language on a variety of academic medical topics.
2. Grasp the style of the academic and scientific writing and be able to practice it.
3. Expand their English lexis repertoire in addition to specialized medical terminology

## 5. *Conclusion*

English is the present language of medical communication. Therefore, designing a course that meets all learners' needs is, in fact, a painstaking task. A Medical English teacher might face obstacles such as feeling uncomfortable with his/her "lack of knowledge in medicine", since students have the background in medical area and the technical terms cause no problem for them; however, the teacher must be an expert in Medical English, not in Medicine i.e., he is not teaching the content but the form. And, as Pauline Webber (1995) states, "*the teacher is at an advantage linguistically anyway and the learners will in fact probably feel more relaxed at speaking in front of a teacher who is just a language expert and not a subject specialist, too, who might become an over dominant figure in the class. [...]The teacher may admit ignorance of the specialist discipline, but must never give the impression that the subject itself is uninteresting or unimportant*". According to Pavel (2014) other problems that may face medical teacher is the differences in students' level of proficiency; therefore, creating a mixed ability classes and wasting time to work with them.

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