



*Teachers' Reflections and Students' Reactions to the Use of the Textbook  
Interchange for Second Year Medical Faculty at Oran University*

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**Abstract:**

This paper investigates the results of the implementation of English into Medical studies in the faculty of Oran University 1. It also describes its impact on medical students, their teachers and the administration. By impact we refer to the attitude of these students and what are the problems encountered during such initiative. Through the study, we investigate medical students' reactions and teachers' reflections regarding the English language teaching method. At the end, an effective evaluation of this endeavor is presented in order to add some valuable insights to voice students and teachers concerns to the stakeholders.

**Keywords:** *English Language variation in education, Language planning, language attitude, ESP, Medical English*

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## INTRODUCTION

Since English is the international language for business and science and given that medical studies are purely scientific, the Algerian future doctors have to write, read and present scientific papers in English, so the local government thought about integrating the English language into all work and education fields gradually replacing the predominant French language which is still looked upon as ‘the language of the colonizer’ reflecting an animosity and a quite derogatory attitude towards a language which according to Algerian politicians does not serve the national and international purposes any more.

In 2019, Algerian policy took a new turn at least theoretically through national speech. The political leaders at that time declared it officially through mass media and ordered immediate execution of adopting English Language over French. Then, all sectors started replacing French with English at least the writing part. For instance in Oran, all the names of the faculties at the entry gate were written in English under Arabic Names. Moreover, official and legal documents at university especially headings, were written and posted in English instead of French, yet not all of them. This is because not all administration staff had good level of English language mastery to switch radically over night their documentation into English correspondence.

At the level of university, this policy had its deep impact especially at the faculty of medicine in Oran. This paper studies the consequences of such implementation from teachers’ testimony and students’ reactions. But first, a glance at the reality of English Language teaching in the Algerian Educational system should clarify the rest of the subsequences of this study. In addition, key questions, such as the variety of English to be taught, the teacher training and the implications resulting from this implementation are listed in the short literature review below.

### 1. Theoretical Framework

In the beginning, the path leading to the faculty of medicine is shortly described in this section to highlight the relationship between medical student and English via milestones of Algerian educational system. Then, Implications for implementing English into scientific departments are discussed. The results did not meet our expectations.

#### 1.1. Which English do we need to teach?

None can argue the importance of learning English but the question is which variety of English? Broughton, Geoffrey et al. (2002:11) claimed that the compelling reasons for selecting a language are either that it is the language of a neighbouring nation, or one of international status. Since English is an international language then, more teaching hours are devoted to English in the classrooms of the world regardless of school streams.

In fact, the linguists recognized that the students of today need to study the variety of English required in their specific fields which serves best their career oriented purposes. Indeed, this is what scholars coined as: ESP—English for Special or Specific Purposes. Since then, linguists, writers and editors kept publishing full, ready to use pedagogical materials designed for teaching scientific, academic, medical, agricultural, engineering English, and the list goes on and on.

Having mentioned that, the problem that rises thereafter is which English to emphasize on or to start with? The linguists illustrated the counterparts that encountered those who learnt only the English of their specialties. They stated the difficulty that they came across during a social gathering after an international seminar, when a French architect could not invite his American neighbour to have a drink, even though he learnt the English of architecture before attending the seminar in London. Consequently, the scholars concluded that ‘Specialized English is best learnt as a second layer built upon a firm General English foundation.’ (Broughton, Geoffrey et al., 2002: 9)

#### 1.2. English Language Teaching (ELT) in the Algerian Educational System

In Algeria, English is learned as a foreign language since the educational reforms of the year 2000. The aim of course was to follow the universal mainstream educational system by adopting the predominant language of science, technology and entertainment, i.e. English. Both in public and private schools and other institutions two major approaches were used in the English classroom: the communicative approach and the competency-based approach.

In middle school, Algerian pupils start their journey with English where they got the chance to learn English for three hours in the first three years and four hours of English in the classroom are spent in the fourth year. Ultimately, they have to learn General English program during the four years of middle school and pass their BEF examination to get to high school.

In what is called secondary school, English is learned during the three years but with different content, timing and coefficients according to the different streams: literary, scientific and technical. Considering the timing, English is taught for four hours in the first year of high school for literary streams and three hours are devoted to scientific streams, while the syllabus is the same to form the basis of General English at high school. Later in the second year, a complete difference in the syllabus is noticed where each class will learn English with different content to best suit the different objectives of each stream. For instance, scientific vocabulary, texts and topics are included in the book of the scientific streams to go along their scientific needs. The same should be mentioned for literary streams where the pupils have to study more specific grammatical rules, vocabulary and discourses merely in the different literary styles.

Students from scientific and mathematic streams holding their Baccalaureate diploma (BAC) with particular good grades are oriented to the Department of Medicine to study for seven (07) years if it is on their list of wish. At the end, they acquire a degree in Medicine where they can become general practitioners or carry on post-doctoral education (Residency) which aims to formulate specialists. Medical students did not have to study foreign languages before the year 2019.

At the level of university and in the year 2005, Algerian higher educational system adopted the LMD principles (Licence, Master and Doctorate) as a reform issued in the Executive Decree 04-371 of November, 21st 2004. These reforms were meant to meet the changing goals according to the Algerian teaching and learning needs. Consequently, the educational system witnessed the emergence of new methods, approaches and disciplines.

### **1.3. ESP Teachers' Training**

Apart from the English department at university, the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research organized various collaborations with British universities to create English for Specific Purpose (ESP) centers for each scientific or technical department in order to open access to international exchange via English projects. The objective was to engage those students and facilitate acquiring the knowledge and academic skills needed for their studies and career wise perspectives because they have to complete their research and publication to be shared in English. In this sense, university English teachers are required to be highly qualified people with a doctorate degree or at least a Magister degree to be allowed to teach at the university as permanent teachers. However, the reality was not the same. Lots of unqualified teachers, who lack the proper training and who have only license or master degrees, are given the responsibility of teaching ESP as non-permanent teachers (vacataire).

University of Science and Technologies of Oran USTO was blessed with the creation of the ESP centre to form and train university teachers. However, not all teachers benefit from such initiative. Most of them are still teaching General English emphasizing on terminology, translating reading comprehension topics and making lists of vocabulary in the target discipline. Therefore, creating more ESP centres is the best way to ensure the spread of ESP training and facilitate its access.

Apart from the various ESP textbooks and teaching materials available in the bookstores or online whether for free or to be purchased, there is still a huge deficiency in the domain of ESP pedagogical innovations. Pr. Miliani (1984) wrote equitably a list about the lack of fully trained teachers of ESP, the shortage of coherent approach, the lack of motivation and interest from students and teachers, which persists until now.

To sum up, ESP training is primordial within the English teacher community. University teachers need to strengthen their strategies and methods in pedagogical and continual research especially for those in the scientific and technical domains because of the increasing demands for integrating more ESP teachers into science and technology fields.

According to Hutchinson and Waters (1987), qualified teachers with high degree diploma know exactly that a successful teacher means the combination of the high diploma plus the continual training courses to acquire and develop new competencies and skills in order to enrich the

teaching experience. They claimed that both pre-service and in-service training are important to shape successful English teachers. However, they incited teachers who cannot find such training to improve on their own through reading, attending seminars, conferences and participating in workshops...etc.

#### **1.4. Implications for implementing English into scientific departments**

It seems the efforts are in vain when it comes to structuring and framing English courses into scientific departments in university classes. Linguists put the blame on the curriculum developers and teachers themselves for not providing enough guidance for content and methodology for ESP programs. Among the implications for implementing English is the unmotivated learner who complains about the overloaded schedule and the quality of the lesson offered by unqualified teachers who in return place the blame on the lack of teaching materials and equipped laboratories. In fact, Bouguenous (2018:67), who conducted a study of ESP at the faculty of medicine in Sidi Bel Abbes, claimed that the Algerian English teacher in many faculties and departments is free to teach whatever he judges relevant to his students due to the total absence of well-designed syllabi and the non-selection of appropriate materials by the curriculum developers. He also criticized the background of most teachers who do not have ESP knowledge in teaching subjects that they are uninterested in from the beginning because of their literary specialties. He even referred to Pr. Miliani (1984) who exposed some of the not honorable motives behind choosing to be a teacher at university and part of 'the elite' purely for the social title and not being able to offer knowledge or emancipate the teaching and learning experience. Furthermore, according to Bouguenous (2018:67), students are unwilling to attend English courses because English is regarded as non compulsory, and even if they do it is for the sake of the final examination score only. In addition to this, he said those students are unmotivated because of the quality of the lesson which focuses merely on terminology and grammar mainly.

Because of this vicious loop, the reality about the situation of teaching ESP in most of the Algerian faculties is not so bright and the faculty of medicine in Oran is just one of them. In these concerns, and similar to Sidi Bel Abbes, Tlemcen University also struggled with the same ESP integration' issues. In fact, Ourghi (2002) wrote his disappointment about the use of General English (GE) instead of ESP and the limited time devoted to this module where mostly part time teachers are assigned such huge responsibility without having the necessary methodology to ensure the ESP teaching. In this sense he wrote respectively:

'Although, those EFL teachers are supposed to implement ESP programs in the different concerned departments, they, indeed, offer no more than GE courses for their learners. Moreover, the time allotted for teaching English which is often not more than one hour and half per week, and the rely on part time teachers in most of the departments added to an absolute absence of a stimulating socio-cultural background and a linguistic unawareness makes it really impossible to talk about any clear methodology in ESP classes of the Algerian university'. (Ourghi, 2002)

## **2. Methodology**

### **2.1. General information**

In the faculty of medicine, English was not taught as an integrated module before the year 2019. According to the ministry note number 4 issued in 2020, students should start learning English in the second year and by the third year level B2 should be acquired. Needless to repeat why, such implementation was elemental. In the above section some of the reasons (political, educational, and social) behind such implementation were listed. Hence, a team composed of three English teachers was assigned to start teaching the second year in the faculty of medicine. The three female teachers were previous permanent teachers at CEIL 1 (Centre d'Enseignement Intensif des Langues). Being one of the responsible teachers, we had the total freedom to teach whatever we perceive essential. We had the total control to plan and prepare the units, the hours and the entry and exit tests for the second year medical studies. The administration made it clear that we should choose the appropriate syllabus and the appropriate methodology according to our knowledge. The main problem to be solved for the administration was how to create a

schedule and set a perfect time table that fits all the 32 groups that composed the 1000 students of the second year in accordance with our daily availability and the other module. This reflected how unimportant English was perceived by the administration staff. After a first meeting with the responsible of teachers of second year medical studies, she made her point clear that she did not appreciate the initiative at all especially with the overloaded schedule and said why not leave the students free to study or not English in specific Centers like CEIL or private schools to improve their English. That is why, they asked for more reduction of hours to fit all groups in one semester where they should acquire one level. Some of the teachers would find this a blessing, not to be controlled by non pedagogical entities and to work for limited hours, while others would be more efficient if they were guided with what and how to teach and when given the specific duration of each course session.

## **2.2. The initiation**

At the faculty of medicine in the University of Oran 1, the committee of teachers responsible for teaching 2nd year medical classes for the first time, inevitably, followed the same wrong path as the universities of Bel Abbes and Tlemcen by implementing General English. After classifying the level of students into groups according to New Headway placement test score using automatic correction machine due to the huge number of students' sheets, the teachers started teaching with the textbook 'Interchange Fourth Edition' for all levels. That is to say, teaching General English to medical students. This choice was agreed upon by the three teachers themselves which was basically their habitual method at CEIL 1, where they used to teach before their mutation (affectation) to the faculty of medicine. At that time, the administration of medicine did not impose any program or set meeting with medical doctors who teach at the faculty in order to plan and prepare an appropriate content to suit the needs and purpose of second year students, nor was this the new English teachers' demands. However, the teachers were given a copy of Article 9 from the Ministerial order issued in 19 January 2020 for fixing modalities of organization, evaluation and progression for second year medical graduation. According to the Article 9:

'Students of second year should benefit from learning foreign languages. At the beginning of the year, and after an English placement test, students are classified into one of the following levels: A1, A2, B1, B2. Students with A1 level have to acquire level A1, A2, B1, B2. Students with A2 level have to acquire level A2, B1, B2. Students with B1 level have to acquire level B1, B2. Students with B2 level are not concerned with this study. Validation of these different levels is done at the end of the third year (the case of the student who starts A1 level in the second year). Certification of level B2 is delivered by those who are responsible of teaching the English language.'

After discussion with the administration, the responsible teachers agreed that the students needed first a solid GE foundation before starting to go in depth into Medical English, especially for the good number of students who scored A1 and A2 level in the placement test. How could they understand medical texts if they cannot control the basic spelling and the grammatical structures properly? At that time, the textbook 'Interchange 4th edition' was the answer. The reasons behind choosing this textbook was that the teachers were very familiar with the method in the first place and also because of its popularity. In fact, a study published on the website of Cambridge.org showed that the American English textbook, Interchange, has been used by over 50 million students worldwide. Thanks to its free access; students, teachers and researchers can easily download the complete series including audio and video resources online. The fourth edition is composed of four levels and each level is made of sixteen units. Each unit is divided into two cycles where the four skills are presented according to listening, speaking, reading and writing as specific topic snapshot, conversation, grammar focus, pronunciation, discussion, word power, listening, writing, reading, and interchange activity. According to what was written in the report of the website, this seemingly complete and ready to use method; is successfully adopted by private schools and university centres and institutions in the Arab world.

## **3. Survey for Medical students**

As mentioned earlier there is a need for a solid general English first layer then ESP as a second step. Trying to apply this notion into medical studies was really discouraging. Medical students who scored A1, A2, B1 and B2 level according to a placement test; were taught General English with textbook series Interchange 4th edition. However, neither the students nor the teachers were satisfied with this method. In the next section, the reasons and impacts of this method was studied and analysed through the interpretations of the results. Notes and reflections of the responsible teachers are also mentioned for further discussions.

The data was collected by a quick and concise questionnaire for second year students. This questionnaire was composed of ten questions (02 background information questions and 08 language use and attitude questions).

### 3.1. Background information questions

1. What is the medium of instruction (language) in your faculty?
2. How long have you learnt English?

All of the students wrote that they were studying their modules at the faculty in French. Prior to that, they have been studying English for seven years since middle school.

### 3.2. Language use and attitude questions

Regarding the importance of English in medical studies and both academic studies, the class opinion splits in two opposing directions. Half of them considered English vital for their studies and the second half could not agree on such significance. This reflected the students' uninterested attitude showed from the beginning and along the daily courses. The same result was reported for their thought on the importance of English in academic studies. Some of the informants seem to be confused and unaware about the status of English in their career and post graduation studies. However, the majority admitted that English is crucial from professional perspectives. At the beginning of class, I explained how important English communication and publications are important in the domain of scientific research for medical students, so some of them were motivated even more to attend the free English classes offered by the Algerian government instead of paying for more language classes outside the university. At the end, they admitted that learning English is a challenging task to medical students. This is due to their overloaded schedule and the long modules that they have to learn by heart.

**Table 1: Importance of English language**

The statement	Agree	Disagree	Not sure
English is important in your studies.	16	0	14
English is important to succeed in academic studies.	16	1	13
English is important for your future professional career.	22	4	4
Learning English is a challenge that you enjoy.	30	0	0

### 3.4. Four skills assessment

**4. Table 2: English language proficiency**

	Very poor	poor	good	Very good
You feel your current overall level of English is ...	0	6	22	2
How would you rate your proficiency in the following skills:				
Listening	0	4	18	8
Speaking	4	10	14	2
Reading	0	8	18	4

Writing	2	4	20	4
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According to the results, the informants claim that their current overall English level is good. However, six of them admitted that they had a poor level. And only two of them claimed being very good in English.

When they were asked to rate their proficiency in the four skills, we reported the following results:

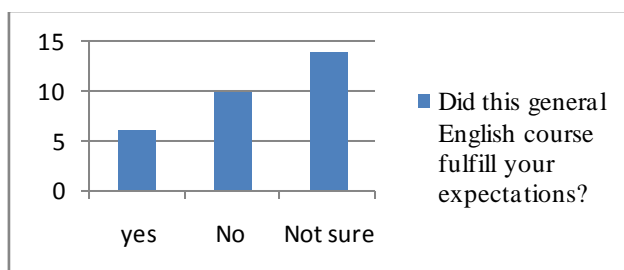
The students acknowledged possessing good level in writing at first then reading and listening in the second position and finally, 14 of them revealed having a good level in speaking. Taking into consideration the whole level of the group, being B1, those results match well the overall level of a B1 level group. However, still a minority seem to be very poor in all skills. And a good number seem to be poor in speaking mainly compared with the two students who praised their speaking skills. This is confirmed by their teacher. Indeed, not more than four students were dynamic and active speakers in my class. They were using very good repertoire some with American accent and others with British.

A good number of medical students seem to lack speaking skills. A language needs to be practiced daily not only in the limited hours in classroom but also outside and getting exposed to a good amount of audio visual English via mass media and internet is vital to improve the listening / speaking skills. This is what the majority of medical students were not doing. The minority who had good listening/ speaking skills admitted watching English programs almost daily and interacting with natives on the net.

**3.5. Did this general English course fulfill your expectations?**

We were not surprised to see that the majority were not satisfied because it was our impressions as teachers too, which was also the reason behind this study basically. After the long tiring three hours of studying Interchange units, both the teachers and students felt exhausted, drained and acquiring a language not related to their jargon and that does not meet their needs. At side note, the informants who said 'No' wrote that they needed more hours in the week emphasizing on the speaking skill even students among those with good proficiencies in listening, reading, and writing.

**Figure 1: Did this English course fulfill your expectations?**

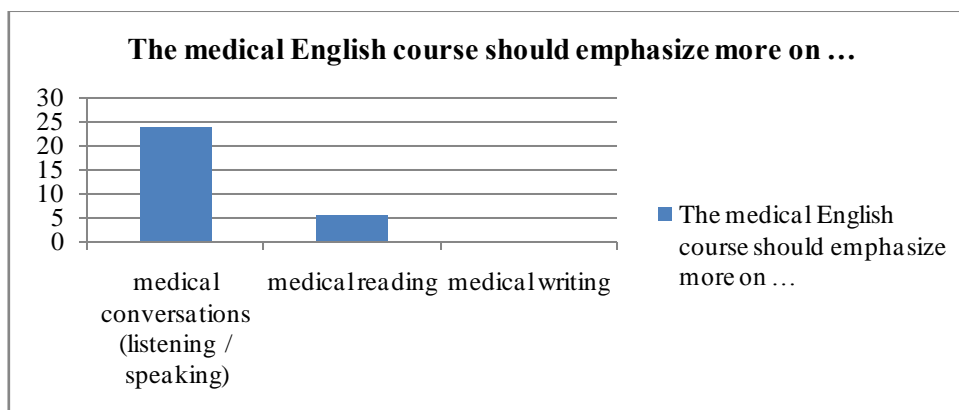


**3.6. Medical English vs. General English**

According to their response, medical students want both General English and Medical English (16). They felt the need to prepare themselves first in General English then in specialized medical English. Those in need of general English are student with low level of English like A1 and A2 who did not study English properly or at all in secondary school. This is because they selected Spanish instead of English or due to the lack or absence of English teacher. In reality, they were badly prepared before integrating the faculty of medicine.

According to the graphs, students were more interested in medical conversations (listening/ speaking) with some medical readings. However, they were uninterested in medical productions.

Figure 2: skills needed in medical English



#### 4. Results and Discussions

The initial sessions with medical students, as their teachers declared, were unexpectedly tiresome because they had to convince apathetic, drained and careless students how important English is all over the world and for their future careers as doctors, in particular. The given arguments were slightly convincing for them. I projected them into the future and asked them to imagine themselves as doctors mastering English competencies to communicate in conferences, seminars and to write their articles to be published in the scientific research fields because they already learnt English along other medical modules during their course of University studies. When I explained that this opportunity is not to be messed with since the government is helping the students to study for free and improve their English level instead of paying in order to pass a level which usually takes up to five months to acquire a specific level with a symbolic price to be paid in University Centres (like CEIL of Oran 1) and a fortune in private language centers or schools considering the economic life of Algerian students, I felt a spark of enthusiasm and motivation on those who were attentive to this clarification. I also gave examples of famous doctors who constructed their private cliques in Oran who used to be our students at CEIL 1. Those doctors wanted to improve their English Level after reaching their goals. They were obliged and needed to learn English then. Those doctors said they used to be very embarrassed when they would travel abroad for business or pleasure. They also emphasized that they had to attend conferences, read latest publications in English and even write their own; which was very challenging for them at their age. Indeed, learning a new language is not that easy when your time schedule is as busy regarding social and work obligations as adults. This is why, you should cease the opportunity and learn a useful language as young students without family obligation or a stressful work schedule to oppose your desire or need to study a language. That was my motivational speech at the beginning. Knowing that dealing with unmotivated students is going to slow or hinder the learning and teaching process, I had to give them a good and convincing reason to accept and do not skip English classes any more.

A year later, the three English teachers concluded that they need to change the use of Interchange series because of its uselessness in the medical field. Based on this questionnaire conducted at the end of the first year and according to its interpretation, we decided to switch to Medical English instead of GE for the reasons listed before in this study.

Fortunately, we found the required criteria in the method Career Path Medical by Longman edition. In fact, each unit composed of two pages included reading in the introduction where the students can listen to the passage multiple times with silent reading before. Then a reading comprehension questions are solved plus vocabulary exercises to enhance the new medical



terms. In addition, there was a listening activity where students had to complete a conversation with terms and expressions and later on practice that conversation in acting out role plays based on the new learnt expressions. At the end of the unit, students have to write something related to the unit like medical chart, fill patient form, and doctor's memo.

We concluded that career path meets best the demands of the students. However, they seemed uninterested in the grammar lessons. In addition, the method career path does not offer any grammatical sections. We had to include some essential lessons from the textbook nursing since the explanation and the given examples were medical related expressions. This mixed method took three hours at first. After the adjustment in the schedule due to the global lockdown after the pandemic of Covid -19, students started the e-learning and due consequently; they had to reduce the class hours into one hour per group. Ultimately, we had to omit the added grammar section to fit the assigned hour.

## 5. After study

Two years later, students compared the previous interchange with career path and expressed their disappointment with what they called 'English of high school'.

Today, even other sectors in the faculty extended their use of English such as pharmacy and dentistry department at the faculty of Oran and they asked for substantial Medical English courses to fit in their busy schedule.

## 6. CONCLUSION

At the Faculty of Medicine in the University of Oran, students learn General English with much focus on teaching medical terminology for the second and third years of their learning process unlike French which is studied during their first year. The implementation of ESP courses in this faculty makes it easier for medical learners to easily access medical knowledge which is most of the time presented in English. Hence, university teachers should claim their right to achieve gradual progress through continual training in ESP and if this one is not to be found, they should take the responsibility to achieve this target by themselves through joining local or international workshops or seminars especially now that the net is offering golden opportunities sometimes for free to attend and acquire new skills online from international professional leagues.

Medical students seem to be unaware of the importance of English later on for their professional lives. They admitted that learning whether General English or ESP is very challenging given their overloaded schedule with what they judge more important modules for their term exam. Nevertheless, there was a minority students well aware willing to cease the opportunity offered by the Algerian education stakeholders to help them save money and time and progress in synchronic rhythm with university graduation and post graduation.

One year later, we recorded some comments of third year students and the same teachers in the Medical Faculty who were not using 'Interchange 4rd edition' textbook but were satisfied with the method 'Career Path for Medical English'.

Is replacing French with English within the Algerian University programs a winning step or another pitfall in the educational realm regardless of the leading factors to achieve this? And is this generation really ready for this transition? Only time will tell the results and that is a potential further study for this research paper.

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