Needs Analysis in English Language Teaching of Medical Students in Kazakhstan

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ABSTRACT

Teaching English at higher education institutions regardless of students' area of specialization ignores their individual differences, needs, wishes, interests and goals. The most important and problematic question in teaching and learning is whether the course is effective or not. The effectiveness of the course is strongly related to learners' attitudes, needs, expectations, satisfaction, and achievement. English for Specific Purposes is student-task oriented, and the basic insight into this trend is to offer course design, content and materials by being responsive to target language learners' own agenda. In this respect, the English language needs of undergraduate medical students in Kazakhstan were investigated by means of a case study conducted with the students of the Faculty of General Medicine at the West Kazakhstan Marat Ospanov Medical University. 52 students (14 males and 38 females) in their first and second year of studies participated in a quantitative survey during the spring semester of the academic year 2020-2021. A questionnaire was adapted from the previous studies in this field (Ait Hattani, 2019; Kayaoglu, Dag Akbas, 2015; Tang, Zeng, 2020), and included items on students' attitudes towards the English course, identify their language strengths and weaknesses, and shed light on their language needs. The findings of the study will suggest practical implications for ESP course design for medical students.

Keywords: needs analysis, English language teaching, university, medical students, English for specific purposes.

1. Introduction

The rapid growth of globalization and the increasing demands of the 21st century have affected different fields, including education. The major goal of the latter is to improve the individual's social and economic prospects. As a matter of fact, the millennial requirements have generated a great demand to drastically change the way teaching and learning is taking place both inside and outside instructional settings, which has consequently led to various innovative practices around the world. One of the major education issues in the 21st century is related to language teaching and learning, English language in particular. With English

becoming the global and most dominant language worldwide in addition to the political, economic, and cultural changes, English language education needed to be reconsidered. English language education has been gradually shifting from its classical applications such as English as a foreign language (EFL) or English as a second language (ESL) toward new paradigms like English for science and technology (EST), English for business and economics (EBE), and English for academic purposes (EAP) (Hattani, 2019).

As far as the Kazakhstani educational system is concerned, the State policy of trilingualism in the Republic of Kazakhstan suggests speaking three languages: Kazakh as a state language, Russian as a language of international communication and English as a language of successful integration into global economics. With more than 130 nationalities living in Kazakhstan, most of the population is bilingual (Kazakh and Russian). Several new reforms have been launched in terms of English language education, approaching English as the international language of science, technology, business, and communication. These reforms focus on institutional, pedagogical, and practical issues, aiming at preparing students and future generations to meet the current academic and professional requirements. People's studying of English is motivated by the government programmes on the development at all stages of education. Introduction of trilingualism at the Universities provides opening English departments, systematic work on publishing and translation of university text-books into English and studying languages based on international standards (Kuzembayeva et al., 2018).

Teaching general English regardless of the area of specialization of students neglects their individual differences, needs, wishes, interests and goals (Kayaoglu & Akbas, 2015). With an awareness of such problems in language education, English for Specific Purposes (ESP) arose as a key solution in 1960s (Hutchinson &Waters, 1987; Johns, 2013; Master, 2005). The basic insight into this trend is to offer course design, content and materials by being responsive to target language learners' own agenda. Therefore, it is necessary to find out first what is specifically appropriate, available and applicable for the target situation and target language learners in terms of their needs. In time, different reasons such as demands of a fast changing world resulted in emergence of different ESP branches.

Due to the acceptance of English in twentieth century as international language of science and medicine, a considerable body of medical research and literature has been produced in English. This dominance of English in medical accounts paves the way for emergence of a new English for Specific Purposes (ESP) branch as English for Medical Purposes (EMP). The basic insight into this trend is to offer course design, content and materials by being responsive to

target language learners' own agenda (Kayaoglu, Akbas, 2015). Most of the EMP research emphasizes on the importance of intra-professional communication, spoken interactions in conferences or medical discourse communities (Master, 2005) and written medical genres including case reports, letters of referral etc (Ferguson, 2013). Similarly, doctor-patient communication skills are particularly at the heart of the field (Basturkmen, 2010).

Compared to other majors, medicine features in its length of schooling, special curriculum, etc. Confronted with an ocean of difficult professional courses, the students always feel unable to get everything done perfectly. Under such great pressure, they are compelled to channel their energy into the courses considered as more important due to the necessity of fulfilling their own demands or realizing their own dreams. Therefore, College English, in which they are not so interested, is their first choice to give up. In the English teaching practice, the students always keep a cold eye towards the English teaching, diverting their energy to the study of professional courses, so it is imaginable that the English teaching efficiency is unlikely to be guaranteed under such circumstances (Tang & Zeng, 2020).

Students of higher education institutions in Kazakhstan regardless of their future professions and departments are taught Foreign Language course which covers general English as regulated by the State Compulsory Standard of Education. Foreign Language (SCSE). According to SCSE, Foreign Language (300 hours or 10 credits) is included in the list of compulsory subjects offered by the universities. The most important and problematic question in ESP teaching and learning is whether the course is effective or not. ESP is student-task oriented, thus, measuring its effectiveness is strongly related to measuring learners' attitudes, needs, expectations, satisfaction, and achievement (Hattani, 2019).

In discovering students' needs, needs analysis is regarded as an integral part of decision making processes before designing a course. Accordingly, needs analysis process is considered as an attempt to answer questions regarding when, where, and why language learners need target language (Basturkmen 2010). Begining with Munby's communicative needs processor in 1978, meanings of needs or types of needs are still matter of discussion in related literature (Basturkmen, 2010). Addressing all these issues, Dudley-Evans and John presents a comprehensive framework of needs analysis:

A. professional information about the learners: the tasks and activities learners are/will be using for - target situation analysis and objective needs

B. personal information about the learners: factors which may affect the way they learn such as previous learning experiences, cultural information, reasons for attending the course and expectation of it, attitude to English - wants, means, subjective needs.

C. English language information about the learners: what their current skills and language use are – present situation analysis – which allow us to assess (D)

D. the learners' lacks: the gaps between (C) and (A) – lacks

E. language learning information: effective ways of learning the skills and language in (D) – learning needs

F. professional communication information about (A): knowledge of how language and skills are used in the target situation – linguistic analysis, discourse analysis, genre analysis

G. what is wanted from the course

H. information about the environment in which the course will be run – means analysis (Kayaoglu, Akbas, 2015).

Therefore, it is necessary to find out first what is specifically appropriate, available and applicable for the target situation and target language learners in terms of their needs. In studying their needs, needs analysis is regarded as an integral part of decision making processes (Kayaoglu, Dag Akbas, 2015). Without conducting a needs analysis process, teaching practices might not be enough for addressing the needs of a medical student studying in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context. Accordingly, as a part of a needs analysis process, this study aims to investigate the English language needs of first and second year medical students who are attending the English language course at the Faculty of General Medicine at West Kazakhstan Marat Ospanov Medical University (Aktobe city, the Republic of Kazakhstan).

2. Method

A case study was conducted to investigate the English language needs of undergraduate medical students in Kazakhstan. The participants of the survey are the students of the Faculty of General Medicine at the West Kazakhstan Marat Ospanov Medical University. A questionnaire was adapted from the previous studies in this field (Hattani, 2019; Kayaoglu & Akbas, 2015; Tang & Zeng, 2020). The questionnaire included items on students' attitudes towards the English course, their language strengths and weaknesses, and their language needs, and consisted of closed-ended questions. The responses were coded by means of the Microsoft Excel software, and the data of the questionnaire were analysed by using descriptive statistics.

The summaries of students' responses to the items were presented in the form of frequencies, and displayed into tables.

3. Results

The questionnaire was answered by 52 students (14 males and 38 females) in their first and second year of medical studies during the spring semester of the academic year 2020-2021. The study reported the findings on medical students' (1) attitudes towards the English course, (2) language strengths and weaknesses, (3) language needs.

3.1. Medical students' attitudes towards the English course

The students were asked to indicate the importance of studying English for their personal needs and future careers. The students' responses are summarized in Table 1, and demonstrate that 96.2% of students consider the English language important for their career.

Table 1. Importance of English for personal and professional careers

Very important	13	25%
Important	37	71.15%
Somehow important	2	3.85%
Unimportant	-	-
Total	52	100%

The students were asked to report the reasons for learning English. The responses are presented in Table 2, and reflect that students' wish to pass IELTS or TOEFL (30.77%), apply for postgraduate studies in future (28.85%), and fulfil studies in an English-speaking country (17.3%).

Table 2. Reasons for Learning English

I learn English because …	N (%)
I want to pass IELTS or TOEFL	16 (30.77)
I need it for my future postgraduate studies	15 (28.85)
I want to fulfil my studies in an English-speaking country	9 (17.3)
I need it in my studies to understand new concepts, and know about new research in my domain	4 (7.69)

I like to meet and get acquainted with native speakers and take part in conversations	4 (7.69)
I will need it in my future career (job)	3 (5.77)
It is a mandatory course in the program (I am obliged to take it)	1 (1.92)

All the participants of the survey state the effectiveness of the English language course offered within the frame of the University study programme (Table 3).

Table 3. Usefulness of the English language course with regards to students' English language needs

Very effective	16	30.77%
Effective	30	57.69%
Somehow effective	6	11.54%
Not effective at all	-	-
Total	52	100%

Total number of respondents indicates that the English language course helps to develop the linguistic ability to deal with the scientific and technical contents in English related to their field. The students prefer their English courses to be more concentrated on speaking and communication, reading and comprehension (Table 4).

Table 4. Areas of English courses to be focused on

Areas	High	Above Average	Average	Below Average	Low
Speaking and communication	21.15%	42.3%	36.54%	-	-
Reading and comprehension	28.85%	30.77%	38.46%	1.92%	-
Vocabulary and medical terminology	13.46%	38.46%	48.08%	-	-
Writing	13.46%	48.08%	38.46%	-	-
Grammar	1.92%	40.39%	57.69%	-	-

3.2. Medical students' language strengths and weaknesses

The students were asked to indicate their content with the English language skills. The results demonstrated that all the respondents are dissatisfied with their levels of English. The students further evaluated their writing, reading, listening, speaking, vocabulary and grammar skills. 5-point Likert scale, where 5 is high, and 1 is low was used to evaluate the language skills. The responses were presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Students' abilities in English language skills

Items	Min	Max	Mean	SD
Writing	3	4	3.385	.4913
Reading	3	4	3.327	.4737
Listening	3	5	3.462	.6405
Speaking	3	4	3.462	.5034
Vocabulary	3	5	3.519	.6101
Grammar	3	5	3.538	.5409

Among the skills of high ability students showed listening (7.69%), vocabulary (5.77%), and grammar (1.92%). Skills of speaking were indicated as above average by 51.92% of students, grammar by 50%, vocabulary by 40.39%, and writing by 38.46%.

The students were offered to state to what extent they had difficulties with the English language sub-skills. 4-point Likert scale, where 4 is seriously difficult, and 1 is easy was used to evaluate the challenges. The results were given in Table 6.

Table 6. Challenging sub-skills of English for medical students

Item	Min	Max	Mean	SD
Understanding spoken instruction	2	4	3.154	.8257
Listening to presentation and discussion in conferences, seminars, etc.	2	3	2.500	.5049
Listening to Media contents in English	2	4	3.173	.7598

Giving speech in English in front of an audience	2	4	2.731	.6298
Speaking to native speakers	3	4	3.346	.4804
Pronunciation	3	4	3.442	.5015
Writing technical texts like letters, CV, email, reports, etc.	3	4	3.442	.5015
Taking notes	1	3	2.500	.5423
Understanding general vocabulary	2	4	2.981	.8042
Understanding technical and scientific terminology	1	4	2.154	.8941
Making correct grammar structure: tenses, articles, etc.	1	3	2.096	.7985

The study showed that students need to improve their sub-skills of English such as writing technical texts, pronunciation, speaking to native speakers and understanding their speech.

3.3. Medical students' language needs

The students were asked to report on how often they use English in their daily life or outside the classroom. The responses were evaluated and presented in Table 7.

Table 7. Frequency of using English outside the classroom

Frequency	N (%)
Frequently	6 (11.54)
Sometimes	19 (36.54)
Rarely	24 (46.15)
Never	3 (5.77)

The students evaluated the significance of English language skills such as speaking, listening, reading, writing. The results are stated in Table 8.

Table 8. Significance of language skills for medical students

Types	Very important	Important	Somehow important	Unimportant
Speaking	50%	50%	-	-

Listening	51.92%	48.08%	-	-
Reading	34.62%	65.38%	-	-
Writing	65.38%	34.62%	-	-

According to medical students, the skills of the highest importance in learning English are writing, listening and speaking.

Regarding the purposes of using English, medical students were offered to measure the activities with 5-point Likert scale (5 – high criterion quality, 1 – low criterion quality). The results are presented in Table 9.

Table 9. Purposes of using English

Item	Min	Max	Mean	SD
Interact with people	2	5	3.250	.9471
Study on medical resources	3	4	3.462	.5034
Perform activities in my field	3	5	3.827	.8098
Write medical reports/papers	3	5	3.846	.7767
Attend any academic context (conference, meeting with professionals etc.)	3	4	3.481	.5045
Correspond with English speaking professionals in the field	3	5	3.808	.7679
Achieve a sufficient score on language exams in the field	3	4	3.462	.5034

Most of the students state the importance of writing medical papers and reports in English.

Regarding the students' preference of assessment types during the courses of the English language, 40.39% of students state their eagerness not to be evaluated during the course, 38.46% prefer process-oriented evaluation (assignments, group works etc.), 19.23% wish to have product-oriented evaluation (a series of examinations, quizzes, etc.), and only 1.92% choose self-evaluation.

5. Conclusions

The results of the study were categorized regarding the students' attitudes towards the English course, language strengths and weaknesses, language needs.

Target situation analysis identified the importance of learning English for medical students. This is objectified with the students' intent to pass English language proficiency examinations such as IELTS and TOEFL, continue with postgraduate studies and abroad.

Regarding students' attitudes to English, most of them consider university course of English quite effective in developing the linguistic ability to deal with the scientific and technical contents related to their field.

Their subjective needs include concentration on reading and comprehension, as well as speaking and communication. It is explained by the importance of being aware of current scientific data on medicine which is usually presented in English, and attending academic context for communication and exchanging best practices with foreign peers during conferences, workshops, etc.

Among the objective needs of medical students is the development of reading and writing skills, which is grounded on the option of performing activities in their fields and writing medical reports and papers in English. Moreover, present situation analysis demonstrates, that students need to improve their sub-skills of English such as writing technical texts like letters, CV, email, reports, pronunciation, speaking to native speakers and understanding their speech.

The findings of the study will suggest practical implications for English for specific purposes course design for medical students and make it become more effective.

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