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## Teaching English to Medical Students: An Evaluation

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### Abstract

This study investigates the challenges for medical students in study matters and at their work places due to lack of linguistic skills. From the population of medical students in Nawaz Sharif Medical College, Gujrat, Pakistan, a sample of one hundred students was selected through convenience sampling that involved the sample being drawn from that part of the population which was close at hand and it included people who were easy to reach.

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Muhammad Younas, Sumrah Arshad, Aqeel Abbas, Mudassar Nawaz and Safira Fatima  
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The data were collected through a questionnaire based on three point rating scale. The Questionnaire was designed after reading a lot of literature on the topic concerned. The purpose and aim of devising this questionnaire was to investigate the importance of ESP patterns in English teaching to medical students. The questionnaire consisted of only ten items because the nature of questions was comprehensive enough to serve the purpose.

The results of the data collected through one hundred questionnaires shown through the graphs and tables. In the end, it was concluded that the absence of ESP patterns in English teaching to medical students is reason for lack of linguistic skills of medical students at their workplaces in Pakistan.

## **Introduction**

The English language has achieved a global status. A quarter of the world's population is fluent in English and no other language in the world today can match the vast spread of the English language (Crystal, 2003). In Pakistan, teaching of English even for specific purposes still depends upon traditional objectives of securing good grades in examination. Competence of the students is measured on the basis of their ability to cram the contents and to reproduce in exams. They secure high marks but, in using language effectively at their workplaces, they are a complete failure.

The present study aims at investigating teaching English to medical students on ESP patterns. The focus of the study is on the students of MBBS (Bachelor of Medicine, Bachelor of Surgery) and DPT (*Doctor of Physical Therapy*) studying at Sargodha Medical College (SMC).

Sargodha Medical College is a constituent college of the University of Sargodha. It is affiliated with the University of Health Sciences, Lahore for conduct of examination and award of MBBS degree. The college is recognized by Pakistan Medical & Dental Council, Islamabad and is accredited by College of Physicians & Surgeons Pakistan (CPSP), Karachi for MCPS and FCPS degrees.

English for Medical students is a branch of English for Science & Technology (EST) which is a branch of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) in the field of English Language Teaching (ELT).

### **Growth of ESP**

From the early 1960's English for Specific Purposes (ESP) has become one of the most prominent areas of EFL teaching today. There is increasing number of universities offering an M.A. in ESP (e.g. The University of Birmingham and Aston University in UK). There is now a well-established international journal dedicated to ESP discussion, *English for Specific Purpose: An international journal*.

What makes ESP unique and in demand, according to Dudley-Evans (1998), is that it is an approach to language teaching in which all decisions related to content and method are based on learners' reasons for learning. ESP courses bridge the gap between learners' basic English proficiency and their mainstream courses while helping students develop language study and research skills appropriate for study in a particular academic discipline or profession. The primary aim of an ESP program is thus to present a holistic English learning program for all students.

Richards (2001) suggests that at present time emphasis should be on learners' needs as the initial step in Curriculum Development. Once learners' needs could be identified, learning goals could be specified. The effort to make language courses more pertinent to learners' needs led to the growth of ESP. But in Pakistan, ESP is still in infancy and needs long time to mature.

### **Definition of ESP**

There is much controversy about the definition of ESP in various countries. The term "specific" in ESP refers to the specific purpose for learning English. ESP assesses the needs and integrates motivation, subject matter and content for the teaching of relevant skills. Anthony

(1997) notes that there has been considerable recent debate about what ESP means despite the fact that it is an approach which has been widely used over the last three decades. At a 1997 Japan Conference on ESP, Dudley-Evans offered a modified definition. The revised definition he and St. John postulate is as follows:

### **Absolute Characteristics**

1. ESP is defined to meet specific needs of the learner.
2. ESP makes use of the underlying methodology and activities of the discipline it serves.
3. ESP is centered on the language (grammar, lexis, and register), skills, discourse and genres.

### **Variable Characteristics**

1. ESP may be related to or designed for specific disciplines.
2. ESP may use, in specific teaching situations, a different methodology from that of general English.
3. ESP is likely to be designed for adult learners, either at a tertiary level institution or in a professional work situation. It could, however, be for learners at secondary school level.
4. ESP is generally designed for intermediate or advanced students.
5. Most ESP courses assume some basic knowledge of the language systems.

Hutchinson and Waters (1987) state that there is no difference between the two in theory; however, there is a great deal of difference in practice. Hutchinson and Waters (1987:19) rightly say that "ESP is an approach to language teaching in which all decisions as to content and method are based on the learner's reason for learning." In this connection, Dudley-Evans (1998) further explains that ESP may not always focus on the language for one specific discipline or occupation, such as English for Law or English for Engineering.

### **Needs Analysis**

Berwick (1989:52) suggests a basic definition of need: a need is a "gap or measurable discrepancy between a current state of affairs and a desired future state". Need analysis in the

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field of language teaching was first used by Michael West in a survey report published in 1926 (White, 1988). In the following years, need analysis was given less attention because traditional structural view of language was emphasized in the field of English language teaching (ELT). The term *need analysis* re-emerged in 1970s as a result of intensive studies conducted by the Council of Europe team. The team concluded, while developing an approach to teach the major European languages to European adults, that language can be taught effectively only by determining the target situations' needs of the learners.

Richards, et al. (1992) define needs analysis as “process of determining the needs for which a learner or group of learners requires a language”. Richard (2001) suggests that emphasis should be on learners' needs as an initial step in curriculum development. Once learners' needs were recognized, learner goals could be specified. Cowling (2007) states that importance of need analysis is often neglected. He suggests that specific needs of the students should be kept in mind while preparing material for them. The importance of needs analysis has been admitted by a number of researchers and authors (Munby, 1978; Richterich and Chancerel, 1987; Hutchinson and Waters, 1987, Tarone and Yule 1989; Robinson, 1991; Iwai et al.1999, Finny, 2002 and St John, 2009).

## **Previous Studies**

Ahmed Mohammed Al-Ahdal (2008) conducted a research to investigate English for Medical Students of Hodeidah University, Yemen. He concluded that ESP in Yemen is generally associated with English for Business Purposes (EBP) and teaching English to medical students needs a specific set of competencies. Mohan and Banerji (1985) examined 2564 teaching components of 346 GE syllabuses of 79 universities in India relating to B.A., B.Sc., B.Com., B.Sc. (Ag.), and B.E. programs and suggested a practical path to access the learner's needs, formulate objectives and select content for a syllabus.

Aslam (1989) stressed the need to adopt a language teaching approach that caters to the specific needs of students following different disciplines. According to him, the GE courses administered in India are purposeless and have failed to develop the communicative competence

in the students. ESP can claim a strong position under the circumstances and can take the place of GE courses (Aslam, 1989:124).

## **Problem Statement**

The present study intends to explore teaching English to medical students on ESP patterns. This is pursued mainly because most of the studies on teaching English have been conducted in other situations, and little attention has been paid to ESP patterns while teaching English language. The researchers believe that teaching English to medical students has its own pedagogical implications. The choice of evaluating teaching English to medical students on ESP patterns is based on the anecdotal evidence that medical students do not feel comfortable at their workplaces as far as the use of language skills is concerned. In our local context, teaching English on ESP patterns has not yet been researched and consequently we lack a concrete frame work to understand teaching practices properly. The present study is a step in that direction and intends to document teaching English to medical students on ESP patterns.

## **Research Questions**

The present study will attempt to answer the following questions:

1. Is English taught to medical students on ESP patterns?
2. What solutions can be proposed for the current deficiencies in the English course for medical students?
3. How important are English language skills for the medical students?
3. What are the medical students' expectations regarding their English language teachers?
4. What are the strengths and limitations of the Medical English courses?

## **Hypotheses**

Medical students are not being taught English on ESP patterns.

1. Medical students are not satisfied with their English teachers and the English courses.

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Muhammad Younas, Sumrah Arshad, Aqeel Abbas, Mudassar Nawaz and Safira Fatima  
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2. Medical students' linguistic skills are not sufficient for their work place needs.

### **Objectives Of The Study**

The major objectives of the study are:

1. To explore the possibilities of incorporating some essential skills into the medical course which medical students need at the work place.
2. To understand students' motivation and attitudes towards English language learning in order to formulate effective strategies.
3. To make an explicit statement about the teaching of English to medical students.

### **Significance of the Study**

There is dire need to evaluate existing methods of teaching English to medical students in our educational system to develop an effective English learning environment. The study is designed to explore the linguistic needs of medical students. The study would help to identify the shortcomings of English course/s taught to medical students. The study will enable the course designers to bring certain amendments in English course/s of medical students to meet the targeted level.

Moreover, this study will open new horizons for those who are interested in investigating linguistic needs of medical students, and intend to conduct further research in this domain.

### **Delimitation of the Study**

Teaching English to medical students on ESP patterns can be explored in different ways and in different areas of language. However, this study is limited to medical students in two different majors: MBBS and DPT due to stipulated time to complete the study and lack of resources. The study aimed to bring together information from representative group of Sargodha

Medical College's students. Thus the findings and recommendations will be generalizable only to this population.

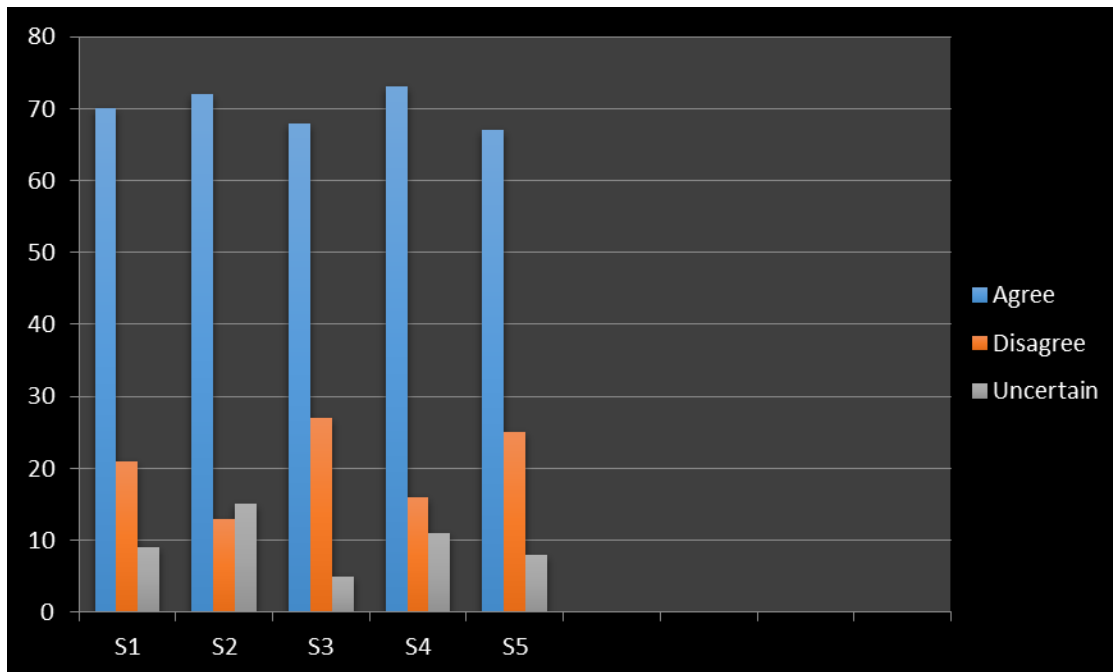
### **Research Methodology**

From the population of medical students in Nawaz Sharif Medical College Gujrat in Pakistan, a sample of one hundred students was selected through convenience sampling that involved the sample being drawn from that part of the population which was close at hand and it included people who are easy to reach. The data were collected through a questionnaire based on three-point rating scale .The Questionnaire was designed after reading a lot of literature on the topic concerned. The purpose and aim of devising this questionnaire was to investigate the importance of ESP patterns in English teaching to medical students. The questionnaire consisted of only ten items because the nature of questions was comprehensive enough to serve the purpose. The results of the data collected through one hundred questionnaires are shown through the graphs and tables.

### **Data Analysis**

The students face many challenges because they are taught English without ESP patterns.





**Table 1 Shows:**

S.1 The students face many challenges because they are taught English without ESP patterns. Seventy percent students agreed, twenty-one percent students disagreed and nine percent students were uncertain about statement number one.

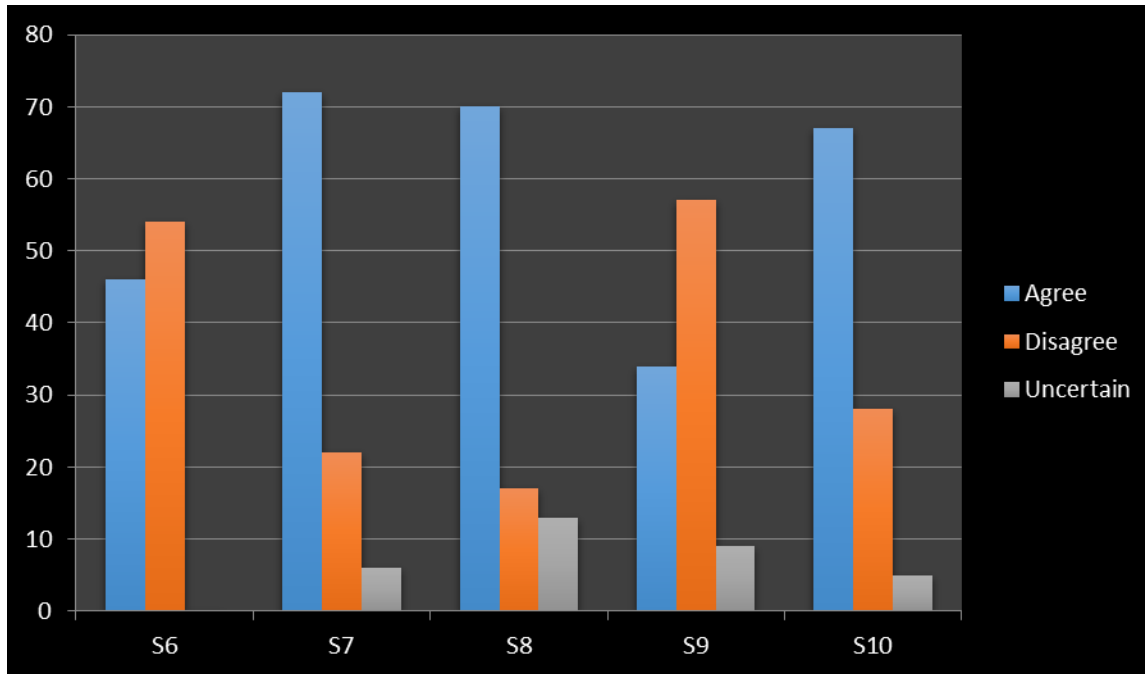
S.2 In our educational system, only a little bit attention is paid to ESP patterns for medical students. Seventy two percent students agreed, thirteen percent students disagreed and fifteen percent students were uncertain about statement number two.

S.3 The courses for medical students lack syllabus which is necessary for linguistics skills. Eighty-six percent students agreed, twenty -even percent students disagreed and five percent students were uncertain about statement number three.

S.4 English language skills are very important for medical students to run their job affairs. Seventy-three percent students agreed, sixteen percent students disagreed and four percent students were uncertain about statement number four.

S.5 The students of medical fields are not provided with due guidance to improve English

language skills. Sixty-seven percent students agreed, twenty-five percent students disagreed and eight percent students were uncertain about statement number five.



**Table 2 Shows:**

S.6 The students of medical colleges do not feel comfortable at their workplaces because they do not have necessary linguistics skills. Forty-seven percent students agreed, fifty-three percent students disagreed and no student was uncertain about the statement number six.

S.7 Linguistics skills are very important for medical students in study matters. Seventy-two percent students agreed, twenty-one percent students disagreed and seven percent students were uncertain about statement number seven.

S.8 The present situation of medical students tells us the importance of ESP patterns for medical students. Seventy percent students agreed, seventeen percent students disagreed and thirteen percent students were uncertain about statement number eight.

S.9 The students of medical fields are unable to use language accurately and effectively. Thirty-three percent students agreed, fifty-eight percent students disagreed and nine percent students were uncertain about statement number nine.

S.10 Students felt the need to be taught on ESP patterns.

Sixty-eight percent students agreed, twenty-eight percent students disagreed and four percent students were uncertain about statement number ten.

### **Conclusions and Recommendations**

The results indicate that the absence of ESP patterns in English teaching to medical students is responsible for lack of linguistic skills of medical students in Pakistan. The results also indicate that students of medical fields are not quite satisfied with their courses because they are not taught on ESP patterns. The students of fourth year know better the importance of ESP patterns in English teaching to medical students for linguistic skills which are necessary for their workplaces than the students of first year. It is necessary that the students of medical fields should be taught on ESP patterns to improve the linguistic skills for their work places and study matters.

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Muhammad Younas, Sumrah Arshad, Aqeel Abbas, Mudassar Nawaz and Safira Fatima  
Teaching English to Medical Students: An Evaluation

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