In the Name of God

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Medical Students and Instructors' Attitudes towards Their English Textbooks: ESP Needs Analysis

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Abstract:

This study aimed at evaluating the book *Medical Terminology* by Cohen (2008) which was used by medical students in their ESP courses. The study also examined the English language needs of these students from students and instructors' point of view. A total of 50 students studying in Ardebil University of Medical Sciences and two English instructors participated in this study. They were freshmen and the whole class participated in this study. The study was a mixed methods design using questionnaires. In the first part of the questionnaire English language needs of these students were examined. For the purpose of understanding participants' attitudes towards their ESP textbook, Textbook Evaluation Checklist (Miekley, 2005) was used. The questionnaire consisting of 43 items examining ten factors of content, vocabulary and grammar, exercises and activities, physical make-up, general features, background information, methodological guidance, supplementary exercises, context, skills and strategies. The results revealed that there were statistically significant differences between students' and instructors' perceptions in all mentioned factors except background information and supplementary exercises and materials of the book. Also the findings indicated that the book Medical Terminology, despite having some demerits is a useful textbook for these students. Suggestions regarding the skills and strategies, activities, attractiveness of the text and physical make-up and other important issues are discussed.

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List of Abbreviations

ESP: English for Specific Purposes

EAP: English for Academic Purposes

EST: English for Science and Technology

EBE: English for Business and Economics

EOP: English for Occupational Purposes

ESS: English for Social Science

EMP: English for Medical Purposes

ELT: English Language Teaching

EFL: English as a Foreign Language

ESL: English as a Second Language

EGP: English for General Purposes

LSP: Language for Specific Purposes

ENOP: English for no Obvious Purpose

TEFL: Teaching English as a Foreign Language

TESL: Teaching English as a Second Language

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Introduction

English is now well established as the lingua franca of worldwide communication. It is the language of international business, the language of international conferences, the language of international education and research, the language of the international communications network and the language of international travelers. Often, it is the native language of neither group of speakers but it is the language they will most likely use to communicate in these kinds of settings. This is a topic that is attracting considerable attention in ESP research.

Contemporary world with its enormous load of knowledge to be absorbed and competitive behavior all around, calls for a new approach to education. There is a need demanded upon student to orientate in the world and become a specialist in the field. The latter refers to pressure of interconnecting theoretical knowledge with practice at schools. In reality, the new ideas of the world of work brought to school will enhance learners' motivation to study.

This chapter presents information on the background and purpose of the study by clarifying the ESP (English for Specific Purposes) context at Science and Medicine University for medical students. Next, research questions are presented. Finally, definitions of some basic terms used in this study are presented.

1.2. Background to the Study

The demands made upon the language teaching professions have changed as changes have taken place in the world. We have to admit that the study of the English language is very important nowadays. It is the bases for better communication between people either specialists or not. It was the rapid development of new technologies since the end of WW II that contributed to the creation of learners who learnt English not just for pleasure but for specific purposes.

ESP or the acronym for "English for Specific Purposes" refers to an instinctive but strong movement which has spread over the world and is still continuing with more power and effects. It issued from the traditional current of TEFL/TESL and has progressively

established itself as a separate new trend influencing the whole English Teaching/Learning process.

ESP is a relatively new discipline within Applied Linguistics that bids a new learner-centered approach to English language teaching whose methodology is based on the specific needs of the learner. Kennedy and Bolitho (1984, p.3) point out that ESP is based on „an investigation of the purposes of the learner and the set of communicative needs arising from these purposes". In recent years, the language teaching focus has been shifted from teachers to learners. As a result, learners needs have been considered pivotal in curriculum development.

The academic requirement for students majoring in fields other than English to pass English for Special or Specific Purposes (ESP) courses at university level has led to a rapid growth of such classes in Iran. The ESP is grounded and founded by a tri-polar infrastructure, as Basturkmen (2006) states needs analysis, time, and language.

ESP is targeted at meeting the needs of the practitioners, at the service of establishing effective communication in accordance with the specific field of study or work. Richards and Farrell (2005) states that, ESP courses "are typically aimed at short-term and intermediate goals" (p.3), goals which are obtained through the process of needs analysis. The notion of time is very determining in the ESP courses as it may be confined to a limited time. Most ESP courses are parts of "in-service training"(Larsen-Freeman, 2001). And last, the notion of language which should be learnt to obtain the knowledge of the specific discipline in English, and is not for the purpose of general education.

McDonough (1984) states that, although the interest and development of ESP has been very rapid since 1960s, the ESP teaching should not be recognized as a separate development which is very much different from language teaching in general. ESP according to McDonough (1984) should be taken as an instructional activity which has its own emphases and range of activities which are not totally different from other areas of language teaching.

In ESP English is a means of furthering learners' specialist education or as a means of performing a social or working role such as a scientist, and they are generally highly conscious of the use to which they intend to put it. When needs are clear, learning aims can be defined in terms of these specific purposes to which the language will be put. ESP has developed at different speeds in different parts of world because different needs arise in

different language-learning environments. Thus, it is not considered a „monolithic universal phenomenon" (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987).

A key feature of an ESP course is that the content and aims of the course are oriented to the specific needs of the learners. ESP courses, then, focus on the language, skills, and genres appropriate to the specific activities the learners need to carry out in English. Typically (although not always) ESP students are adult learners. They are also often a homogeneous group in terms of learning goals, although not always in terms of language proficiency.

However, identification of the needs calls for a systematic way. This systematic way is defined as needs assessment. York (1982) defines needs assessment as "the ordering and prioritization of community needs" (as cited in Reviere, 1996). So, two steps need to be followed in order to fulfill the aim of a needs assessment. Applied to language context, it may be defined as the process of determining the needs for which a learner requires a language and arranging the needs according to priorities.

But according to Yarmohammadi (2005), "language teaching in Iran does not follow any specific purposes - i.e. it can be characterized as language for no specific purposes" in most of ESP contexts at Iranian Universities. ESP is nowadays increasingly taught to large classes of demotivated learners by inappropriate teachers with very limited resources.

On the other hand, the knowledge and usage of English that school leavers possess gives rise to concern. Students find it very hard to cope with learning ESP basically because of lack of the General English skills. The ESP course introduces learners to English for economics, i.e. the kind of language they will face in their future profession. Learners have to master terms used in economics, to be able to understand formal professional texts and authentic recordings of lectures and produce formal pieces in writing as well as to be able to make professional presentations and participate in discussions on contemporary economic issues.

Moreover, students who are technically ready for work after finishing their university studies, are not so prepared to apply their knowledge of English to a labour context, evidently more specific, and for this reason, we sustain that such a situation should be avoided as far as possible.

In Iran the separation between ESP and EGP is not much clear, when it comes to syllabuses and methodology, and who is better trained to teach what. In Iran, there are three different contexts in which ESP is being taught. In the first context content teachers,

specialists in each field, teach ESP courses. In the second context, language teachers teach ESP in different fields of study such as Engineering, Medicine, etc. And in the last context, language teachers at professional Language Departments of each discipline teach ESP only in one field of study.

Needs analysis is also one of the major characteristics of ESP programs, but usually teachers ignored it and they design a course based on their own idea without considering learners needs and wants. One of the teachers' main tasks will be selecting appropriate books which satisfy learners' needs and supporting the students in their efforts, and providing them with feedback on their progress.

Besides, materials selection, adaptation, or writing is an important area in ESP teaching, representing a practical result of effective course development .In ESP materials are not just a mere tools that can be randomly use to assist the teaching and learning process, but, materials are also one of the important aspects in teaching ESP to guide the teachers and students in understanding the subject better.

As it was mentioned one of the most important components of curriculum is the textbook which provides a clear framework that, teachers and learners know where they are going and what is coming next, so that there is a sense of structure and progress. Ur (2006, p.184) mentions that "the textbook is the cheapest way of providing learning material for each learner.

The teacher's decision to use a readily available textbook or tailor-made textbook is mainly based on the learners' subject area. If their subject area is more general, the likelihood of finding suitable published materials is much higher. Accordingly, ESP teachers will most often select suitable materials from existing printed materials.

When a textbook is introduced, it should be carefully examined to ensure that the material is suitable for the school setting. In this examination, a number of different aspects should be taken into consideration, for example the age and proficiency level of the students, what language factors that the students need to learn, the course syllabus and so on (Fredriksson & Olsson, 2006, p.10).

When no suitable printed materials are found, the evaluation of existing materials can serve as a springboard for development of in-house produced materials. In-house produced, tailor-made materials themselves should also be evaluated in order to provide the basis for

their revision with a view to improving their quality and their suitability to the target learners' needs.

1.2.1. Language Teaching Context in Ardebil University of Medical Sciences

Ardebil University of Medical Sciences has been one of the universities undergoing expansion and development in recent years. Medium of instruction is Persian like other universities in Iran. English courses offered in the form of General English and English for Specific Purposes for different fields of study. Students who are competent enough in General English perform better in ESP courses.

In the Universities, English language is being taught as a second language. Some of the fields like medicine mostly have more of their courses in English (as medium of instruction).These ESP courses try to serve the academic needs of students who studying at any department in this university. They have to take English courses which are ESP based.

The faculty of Medicine was founded in 1993. The demands of current world to progress in the field of medicine and the advancements we have in this domain needs more and more efforts to held better English courses to be useful and beneficial for our students. Students studying at the faculty of medicine, take ESP courses in their first and second years during 14 semesters which stand for 2 ESP courses.

All ESP courses in Ardebil University of Medical Sciences are organized and obligatory. The curriculum coordinators state that these ESP courses cater for both academic and job needs of the students. Students in Medicine department receive 2 hours of English instruction each week. Each course last for 14-15 week. Each of these courses has three main components: ESP reading, EAP writing and grammar. In their ESP courses they deal with two published textbooks by the title of Medical Terminology by Cohen in the first one and English for Medicine in the second one.

Evaluation tools used in order to assess the students' performance are stated to be written midterm and final exam and an oral exam in a format of presentation evaluation. The evaluation tools are stated to cover the stated objectives moderately rather than fully. That is because listening skill is not evaluated although it is practiced during the classes.

English instructors teaching ESP do not to have any special training or instruction before being required to teach those ESP courses. Some of those ESP instructors have some other duties than teaching such as working for the Testing and Curriculum Development Units. Swale (1980) proposes that to minimize the constraints, collaborative efforts should be made between ESP teachers, subject teachers and administrators to make necessary modifications towards the desired goals. In this respect, Swales also points out to the need for including the learners' factors especially those related to their study habits and learning strategies. As he puts it,

"....it is very important for a course designer to know not only what his students can do and need to do but also to know what they would be willing to do or could be persuaded to do within the confines of their particular educational environment" (p.68).

1.3. Statement of the Problem

By the growth of science and technology in Iran, it becomes obvious that we are in close contact with other nations in different fields of study. One of these aspects is medicine. In recent years we had more and more developments which are the sign of talent and aptitude of our scholars. So, we need professional experts in the field of medicine to be competent in using English language, because English becomes the language of communication all over the world. They should be able to share their knowledge with other experts, take part in seminars, write articles in English, and read medical books which are in English.

English language courses have been a part of the curricula of medicine field in Iran like any other fields of study for many years. Its reason is that the English is the international language of the world. Depending on the learners needs and their level of study different courses of English such as General English and English for Specific Purposes are offered.

In the Iranian higher education system, students majoring in different fields offered in universities throughout the country have to pass a two-credit basic English course followed by a three-credit General English course. They are then required to pass a two or three-credit ESP course, depending on their majors.

Medicine is a field in which language skills are needed to enable doctors work with more confidence and being up to date. Each of the skills which may be required, reading, writing,

listening and speaking may be of different value in terms of their use in that specific field in order to enable students function effectively in their workplaces and academic environment.

In the educational settings where there are not enough trained and experienced teachers, textbooks can play an important role. This fact does not mean that the teachers' blind faith in or unconditional reliance on textbook. Selection of a textbook is serious business. It involves an expenditure of considerable funds, and teachers will be "stuck" with the book they choose for years. It is worthwhile taking time to make a good selection. It is important to choose a book that fits students' needs.

The most difficult task for most teachers is making choices of what content to teach. Teachers too often allow the textbook to drive instruction. They may provide the basis for the content of the lessons, the balance of skills taught and the kinds of language practice the students take part in. But many teachers have not adequately examined all of the features of their own textbooks before using them.

The use of textbooks in teaching has both advantages and disadvantages, depending on how they are used and the contexts for their use. Both the benefits and limitations of the use of textbooks need to be considered, and if the textbooks that are being used in a program are judged to have some negative consequences, remedial action should be taken.

Hence, language is integrated and consists of different skills such as listening, speaking, reading and writing. Appropriate textbooks should look for a balance of skills. In many cases, the learning situation requires use of many different skills at the same time. McDonough and Shaw (2003, p.175) argue that materials should enable the learners to see how the four skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) can be used effectively in appropriate contexts.

The aim of this study is collecting data about the ESP needs of medical students and evaluating their ESP textbooks based on examining the perceptions of different sources, namely students' and English language instructors'. In reality our purposes includes examining the correspondence between language needs of students and content of the respected book and investigating whether this book satisfy our learners' needs or not, we want to specify their strengths and weaknesses and suggest ways for improving their quality for future use.

1.4. Research Questions and Hypothesis

The present study is an attempt at answering a few questions that pertain to Medical students and instructors attitudes towards their ESP textbook and examine their needs in these classes. The objectives of the investigation can be expressed in the following research questions:

1. What are the perceptions of Medical students and instructors regarding their needs for learning English language?

2. What are the perceptions of Iranian medical students and instructors of their ESP textbook according to Mikely's Cheklist?

3. Is there any significant difference between Iranian EFL instructors and medical students' perceptions regarding their medical ESP textbook?

In the light of the above mentioned questions the following hypotheses were tested:

H0: There is no significant difference between Iranian EFL instructors and medical students' perceptions regarding their medical ESP textbook.

HA: There is significant difference between Iranian EFL instructors and medical students' perceptions regarding their medical ESP textbook.

1.5. Significance of the Study

Many non -English-speaking scientists feel handicapped when oral performance is called upon, even inside their particular situation, due to the over-emphasis placed on the printed text in language instruction. This calls for emphasizing the importance of the learner's role in specifying his needs and language problems, and for breaking up the stereotypical pattern which has generally been adopted in ESP courses. Textbooks contents should be based on learners' needs analysis.

The aim of this study is to reveal what different parties in the teaching and learning process; namely, English instructors, and students perceive the English language needs of Medical students to be. Knowing how much these ESP books in medicine are useful and satisfy their users' needs is an important point we want to deal with in this study. Certainly