

# English for medical study in EFL context: challenges, and possible adjustments

Basim FARAJ

LAIRDIL

## **Abstract:**

In recent years, English has become the most used language in a variety of fields including politics, business, education, and medicine. Hence, English has been viewed as a tool not only for everyday life communication but also for specific purposes to be achieved (Alptekin 2002). Consequently, there has been a dramatic shift into developing specific English language programs to enhance the learners' specific language skills which are related entirely to their own needs. These language programs/courses are known in Applied Linguistics as English for specific purposes (ESP). According to Hutchinson & Waters (1987), ESP is defined as "an approach to language teaching in which all decisions as to content and method are based on the learner's reason for learning" (p.19).

The scope of this study is English for academic medical purposes as an example of the wider concept of ESP and that is because "the English language has become the lingua franca of international communication in medicine" (Hassan et al. 1995, 277). In fact, English language education for medical students has been investigated in a broad range of EFL contexts all over the world, particularly where English is adopted as a medium of instruction. In most such cases, it has been claimed that medical students face genuine problems in dealing with their medical subjects and that could be attributed in part to their inadequate level of English language training.

Consequently, it has become highly demanded for educators and researchers alike to study the English language needs of medical students to provide a basis for designing appropriate courses to assist those students coping with the language challenges during their academic study.

"Discipline-specific language study has long been linked to an expectation that learners' needs should be analyzed in order to select language components that match what students require to succeed in their academic studies" (Kimball 1998, 411)

The current paper examines the English language needs as perceived by different stakeholders including medical students, language teachers as well as subject teachers in one of the medical faculties in Libya (Al Marj). Significantly, no studies have been conducted for this purpose in the Libyan context before. A needs analysis procedure was carried out for this purpose and both quantitative and qualitative data were collected by using two sets of questionnaires. Interestingly, even though English was perceived by all stakeholders as particularly important in Libyan medical education, there is some disagreement between medical students and teachers in ranking the most challenging language skills and sub-skills.

Significantly, this study will be further developed by the researcher in his current PhD to better understand the current situation and to propose a new paradigm for teaching English for medical students in Libyan context. The new paradigm will include a basic theoretical framework of teaching methodology that could be applicable in Libyan context according to the study, it will also include a description of developed curriculum to replace the current teaching materials as a step forward into course design research. Furthermore, it will propose an advanced procedure of language assessment to better evaluate the students' language proficiency.

In fact, this new paradigm will be highly inspired by French practice in teaching English for medical purposes as it has been noticed that most medical schools in France have created effective English language programs for medical students to enhance their communicative competence in medical English and that could be somehow applicable for Libyan context.

**Key words:** English for specific purposes (ESP), English for Medical Purposes (EMP), Needs analysis, Medical Education.