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ENGLISH IN MEDICINE AS A NEW DIMENSION OF EFL TEACHING: SALAMAN BIN ABDULAZIZ AS A CASE STUDY

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ABSTRACT

The present paper contemplates the importance and the actual situation of English for Medicine Purposes (EMP) in the Preparatory Year at Salman bin Abdulaziz University, KSA. This research requires identifying present "teaching-learning" attitudes about EMP and determining the implementation of more effective and more efficient teaching-learning strategies.

Accordingly, this systematic investigation adopts an eclectic approach; in the sense that it will be based two approaches, one, quantitative to measure and to retrieve the necessary data about a panoply of the attitudes of EMP practitioners and students throughout questionnaires, and the other, qualitative approach based primarily on measurable participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and analysis of questionnaires.

KEYWORDS: Needs Analysis, Teaching ESP. Course Design and EMP

INTRODUCTION

Research Questions

- To what extent do practitioners assess the learners' needs?

- To what degree of comfort does practitioners and students find with the actual course design and supporting learning materials?

Research Problem

This empirical survey comes to answer some problematic questions that ask themselves: to what extent do practitioners assess the learners' needs? To what extent are the actual methods of learners' needs analysis efficient? To what extent are practitioners and students comfortable with the actual course design and materials? What are the factual problems that face EMP teaching and learning processes, and how can be solved?

Research objective

- A-Identifying the challenges of teaching and learning EMP,

- B-Reflecting upon the most proper materials and activities in/out the classroom,

- C-Offering appropriate solutions to those challenges for the improvement of the quality of learning facilitation,

- D Creating better assessment of such practices for the continual and ongoing improvement of the quality education for Preparatory Year Programmed students at Salman bin Abdulaziz University.

Research Significance

The proposed study, first of its kind, will result in a paper that accentuates the crucial importance of the actual delivery of English for Medical Purposes (EMP) in the Preparatory Year at Salman Bin Abdulaziz University in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The study will identify the presence "teaching-learning" attitudes of EMP and then determine and design the most suitable teaching-learning strategies for the improvement of English language learning of students of English for Medical Purposes, so that, they will be fully equipped with medical terminology and nomenclature in their under/graduate education and their future professional life.

Research Methodology

This systematic investigation adopts an eclectic approach; in the sense that it will be based on a quantitative approach to measure and to retrieve the necessary data about a panoply of the attitudes of EMP practitioners and students through questionnaires, and on a qualitative approach of measuring participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and analysis of questionnaires.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Globalization and the internet have altered the way in which the countries of the world do medical, and it has become clear that the language of medical is currently English (Graddol, 2000). Some researchers (see, Hyland, 2005, Park, 2006, Kuar, 2006) claim that students from non-English speaking countries have become increasingly eager to improve their level of English. Therefore, English for Medicine is very important to be learned if the Saudi student wants to be among the professional doctors, nurse etc in the world.

Needless to say that as (Al-Oadi, 2000 and Al-Mashary, 2006) claim the English language level of public school graduates is generally not sufficient to meet the demand of higher education in Saudi. Therefore, the Salamna Bin Abdulaziz University in which English is the medium of instruction for Medicine, place newcomers in an English language teaching programme before they start their Medical programme which often called Preparatory Year Prorgrame. According to Salaman bin Abdulaziz University, these students cannot proceed to their academic course of study without passing the English language course. The advantage of this programme is that it makes students aware of the importance of English because they will spend the rest of their studies and their future career namely in the medical field using English.

There is no doubt that needs analysis played a vital role in terms of understanding the relevance and importance of the data collected for this study. Alqahtani (2011) defined Needs Analysis is a dynamic and multi-dimensional tool, the methodology of which has been extensively documented in previous research; some examples are: Chambers (1980) published in the Journal of English for Specific Purposes, ESP books such as those of Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998), EAP works, e.g. Hyland (2005), and empirical research, for example, that of Al-Husseini (2004). (Alqahtani, 2011)

According to some researchers such as Alqahtani (2011) Needs analysis has always been associated with English for specific purposes, although that is not to say that needs analysis would not be useful for general English, or that some teachers do not use it in this way. Seedhouse (1995), for example, outlines a procedure of needs analysis, which enables the researcher to improve the language teaching curriculum in a general English classroom.

However, according to Hutchinson and Waters (1987: 53), needs analysis initially arose mainly in the field of ESP. Nevertheless, they argue that, as far as needs analysis is concerned, there should not be any difference between ESP

and general English (GE). They state that: "it is often argued that the needs of the general English learner, for example the schoolchild, are not specifiable". From above and previous studies (See Alqahtani, 2011, Blue, 2000) this is the weakest of all arguments, because it is always possible to specify needs; even if it is only the need to pass an exam at the end of the school year there is always an identifiable need of some sort. It can be said that what distinguishes ESP from General English is not the existence of a need as such, but rather an obvious awareness of that need. Consequently, it seems plausible to argue that any course should be based on a needs analysis of the learners, as this is how the procedures of EMP can be tailored so as to be beneficial to general English.

In addition, from a review ESP and other specialist journals, and through reading the literature, it is clear that over the last five decades needs analysis has been discussed in depth from many perspectives, e.g. present situation needs analysis, target situation analysis, etc. However, Robinson (1980) claim that, the matter of learners' needs analysis is a tricky business (Robinson, 1980: 27), because, as teachers, researchers and material developers, and course designers, we should be aware of the actual learners' needs: not what we think they should be, but of skills or areas about which they are unaware.

Alqahtani (2011) suggested that needs analysis has always been associated with course design, and this trend has continued in recent decades with researchers such as Al-Husseini (2004: 88), Al-Sudais, 2004 and Benesch (2001). Cowling (2007: 5) asserted that the role of needs analysis in course design may be in conflict with the learners' expectations of how English language courses should be developed. Not long time ago, Hyland (2005) moved to contend that, in the 21st century, needs analysis should be associated with teaching methods, because international students usually come from diverse backgrounds and education systems which are different from the British education system. Thus, this study will explore the Saudi learners' expectations of how English for Medical Purposes should be taught, and the best strategy that should be used in order for them to be taught effectively.

It has been suggested by many specialists in ESP e.g (Alqahtani, 2011 and Blue 2000) that if teachers know about their learners' backgrounds: for example, the learners' expectations about a course, and what they want from it. Have the learners studied a similar course before? If so, for how long, what have they achieved so far and, more important, what is the main reason for attending this course? By doing that, it will allow us as teacher of ESP to assess the next stage (Dudley-Evans and St John, 1998). Also, the best way of effecting language learning skills should be identified; this is also called learning needs.

Thus, this paper is concerned about language, mainly English for Medical Purposes. Consequently, needs analysis here would be, as Richards *et al.* (1992: 242 - 243) state, the process of determining the needs for which a learner or group of learners requires a language, and arranging the needs according to priorities. In doing this, they illustrate how needs analysts gather subjective and objective information about the learner in order to discover the objectives for which the language is needed, the situation in which the language will be used, with whom the language will be used, and the level of proficiency required, etc. Nunan (1988: 13) argues that needs analysis focuses more on the information-gathering process; he states that "techniques and procedures for collecting information to be used in syllabus design are referred to as needs analysis".

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results clearly indicate that the students age is between 18-22 are the major group of respondents in this

survey. This is in line with the researchers' expectations in view of the reasons for students studying English for Specific Purposes. Therefore, the data showed that a large number of the students are studying at Preparatory Year Programme. This would help the EMP organizers and teachers to recognize that ESP courses need to be focused more on social language needs, with the possible addition of a programme focused to a greater extent on targeted language.

In the case of the absence of EMP skills in the Saudi learning environment, it is important to highlight that this is the result of a lack of understanding of strategic analysis, resulting from the fact that Saudi students studying at higher education which English language context are a new phenomenon. Therefore, whilst students are quick to blame the gaps in their English language education on the course designers in Saudi Arabia and the quality of the teaching, we should remember that this is one of the first studies of its kind and as such is intended to help redress some of the difficulties experienced by the Saudi students studying English for Medical Purposes, as these are not yet fully understood.

By asking students about the English language courses, which are provided within the Saudi education system. The outcomes from this particular question were not surprising; previous studies such as that of Alqahtani (2011) have found similar results. Most of the students stated that the English language programme provided by the Saudi education system is not sufficient to meet the Saudi higher education and their needs when they join the Preparatory Year Programme.

The resources for this case study aimed to provide the reader with an understanding of the student's background and a sense of where they experience difficulties that could be addressed by the EMP course at Salman Bin Abdulaziz University. The major finding of this study was that the majority of the students who participated in this study were studying for EMP, as explain. Regarding their marital status, the majority of them are single. Regarding the language issues, the participants' judgment of the language course provided by the Ministry of Education was that it did not satisfy them. In the case of the absence of ESP skills in the Saudi public school, it is important to highlight that this is the result of a lack of understanding of strategy analysis (SA) resulting from the fact that Saudi students studying English in their First year at university are a new phenomenon.

At present, at Salman Bin Abdulaziz University, the focus is on English language skills, both for study and future application in a medical environment. Therefore, a good level of English and its wider utilization are now crucial requirements for all medical areas in Saudi. According to some departments in KSA, e.g. the Ministry of Health, the proficiency level in the English language is a major requirement when judging students' eligibility to enter tertiary institutions, as well as in the recruitment of human resources e.g. nurse, doctor, etc. throughout the KSA. This enthusiastically supported phenomenon has become a major issue nationwide, leading ultimately to make English language for the first year for medical students are compulsory.

According to the findings from the questionnaire, the Saudi students sampled in this study had begun to learn English as a foreign language at an inappropriate age, in terms of their cognitive development as second language learners see Alqahtani (2011). They were between childhood and adulthood when they began studying English, whereas, according to Park (2006), learning the English language at the age of 13 is rather late in terms of experiencing the most effective development of second language learning skills. It would be helpful if students started learning English at the age of 6, as is the case in some private schools in Saudi Arabia. It seems that Saudi students have previously not been fully cognizant of why they were expected to learn English, and this has limited how far they could progress in terms of their English proficiency level.

The results also revealed that participants were taught EMP at the university by unqualified English teachers who required them to learn in a passive, top down way. This meant that participants received constant feedback from their EMP teachers about their mistakes during the learning process, eroding their confidence.

The results from the case study also showed that most of the participants had taken extra courses before studying their first year at the university at some private institute inside the KSA and out sit the KSA e.g. UK during their summer break. Most of them had attended a general English course and seemed to be unaware of the different types of English specialism. It is accepted, as suggested by many ESP researchers (Jordan, 1997 and Hyland, 2005), that students should at least attain the intermediate level before they start any specific English course such as English for Medical Purposes. It can be said that it would be helpful for students to be provided with an opportunity to learn ESP within previous schools before coming to the university.

The data showed that many participants had to attend a general English course in while studying at the Preparatory Year Programme, alongside their EMP one, before starting their academic medical programme. This suggests that the English courses that students had attended were insufficient in some way. This is further suggested by the fact that those who attended EMP courses had spent a considerable time studying on them. Therefore, it is apparent that if students could learn general English and EMP effectively, this could save a lot of time. It is important to understand, however, that this is not to suggest that students should not attend an EMP course; rather, that they should arrive at the university well prepared and join EMP course at Saalman Bin Abdulaziz University.

According to Edward and Ran (2006), the relationship between teachers and students is important because an effective one will speed up the process of learning in the classroom by motivating students to try their utmost to make the most of the lessons. Therefore, most if not all the participants experienced difficulties with the educational approach to teaching EMP at the Salaman Bin Abdulaziz University. The findings suggested that participants were struck by the differences between the teacher-student relationships with native English speakers and those non- native English speakers, especially the level of informality between native English speaker teachers and their students.

With regard to EMP, however, the students were particularly dissatisfied with the course materials and this had a negative impact on learning performance. This is not to say that those materials are not perfect, but that students found it strange to be provided with textbooks which they then had to study and bring to every lesson and yet often did not use. EMP teachers can usefully recognize that, owing to the differences between the ESP and EMP with regard to textbooks, it is important to explain to students the benefits of using handouts rather than books.

Students in this study who were currently enrolled in medical undergraduate programmes were shown to have difficulties in adapting to using English appropriately in the medical context. With regard to adaptation difficulties, two important findings of this study were a lack of exposure to a real English speaking environment and unfamiliar with the use of English, particularly for medical purposes. The research findings from sample responses in this study clearly indicated that the most difficult skill for students was reading, followed by writing, speaking and listening.

The findings of this case study can contribute to the discussion and formulation of strategies to develop more effective ways for Saudi medical students to prepare for medical undergraduate programmes, in terms of their language and academic needs. Successful achievement of their goals and gaining an understanding of their new academic context are real burdens for Saudi medical students (Alqahtani, 2011). Currently, these are barriers that prevent them from adapting

linguistically. The Saudi medical students sampled in this study clearly indicated that they had shown different levels of adaptation depending upon the EMP programmes they had experienced prior to entering their medical undergraduate programmes.

CONCLUSIONS

To conclude this study, it is fair to say that the students arrived without a sufficient level of English to start their undergraduate medical programme, and had been unaware of the importance of EMP. More important, this study raised the question: *Why are participant taking an EMP course?* It was determined that the course is compulsory, although the students themselves do have their own personal and academic goals regarding what they want to achieve from the EMP course. In addition, the data helped us to understand to a certain extent how participants learn and also their level of English.

It is apparent from the data that participants' needs did not meet their actual needs. This raised a series of questions and answers which will be very helpful in formulating recommendations for improving the preparedness of Saudi medical students to participate effectively in their medical academic environment:

Q1. *Which language skill areas will be the most problematic for the participants?*

Reading and Writing.

Q2. *What written genres will be used?*

Laboratory reports, medical report, dissertations, seminar papers and academic conference abstracts.

Q3. *What will the content be in terms of vocabulary?*

Medical vocabulary

Q4. *Who will the Saudi medical learners communicate with?*

Their peers, teachers, examiners, nurse, patient, doctors, and supervisors.

Q5. *Where will the Saudi medical learners use the language?*

They will use it in a physical setting: hospitals, conferences, workshops, and in non- physical settings: writing reports.

Finally, it is strongly argued that Saudi medical students' needs should be met, because this will create a positive intellectual climate and help them to achieve their academic medical goals. Addressing their needs is not easy, but it could be done by collaborating with the students' previous high school before they commence their Preparatory Year Programme at Salman Bin Abdulaziz University. This would help university to accommodate their wishes.

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