

Problems of English for Specific Purpose Course for Medical Students in Myanmar Context

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Abstract

An ESP course for medical students intends to help them study their subject matter and in their profession in the future. It is now broadly accepted that the English language has become the language of international communication. The widespread need for English as a foreign language puts great pressure on the educational resources of many countries. ESP courses need specific language and skills that are related to communities of practice and disciplines. Careful examination of the attitudes and perceptions of learners and instructors was seen to be significant in determining the problems of ESP courses. This research has emphasizes on an ESP course offered at the Faculty of Medical Sciences in Myanmar. The investigation aimed at congregating such data from the students and their lecturers at

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university and perceiving ESP classes to make informed decisions to certify effective language learning. The tools used in this study were questionnaires for 77 medical students, interviews with 16 ESP lecturers, and observations by the researchers. The facts from the questionnaires were analyzed by using the statistic program, version 16. The results showed that ESP instruction was restricted to training special vocabulary and reading and translating numerous texts. Of course, current teaching methods did not reflect students' interests and resulted in the low motivation of learners and their poor participation. This study accepted that the English language was used extensively in the medical field. Therefore, ESP courses for medical students should be based on the target needs of students representing communicative use of language rather than linguistic categories.

Keywords: Learners and instructors, Preferences and expectations, ESP classes, Universities of Medicine

Introduction

According to Dudley and John (1998), ESP is designed to meet the needs of the learners. Another important characteristic of ESP is to answer to the changing political, economic and social trends and this flexibility needs its permanent adaptation to different contexts. Therefore, the job of the English teacher becomes even more difficult as his/her duty is to keep pace with the changing needs and to equip them with the necessary skills in order to successfully operate in English in the continuously changing working environment. English plays an important role in higher education all over the world. There has been a universal growth in the call for English for Academics courses. English, the lingua franca of all sciences, has come out in non-English speaking countries as English for Specific Purposes (ESP). ESP is a developing branch of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction. Despite the importance of ESP courses for students in Myanmar, especially medical students, there have been very infrequent studies that generally and definitely examined the English language needs of medical students. English has so distant been instructed without an efficient consider

of the requirements of the medical students. A significant characteristic of language instruction on the higher educational level is learning English for a given purpose, with the specific goals of getting to know the specialized vocabulary, growing one's knowledge about the subject matter by reading in English, and being able to use the language in the future profession or study area by becoming prepared for some common circumstances such as carrying out higher-level studies, going for an interview or conducting specialized communication. Many English language courses in academic settings are built on the principle that language should be connected to the purpose for which students are expected to use the language after their studies. Thus, careful examination of the expectations and perceptions of students and instructors is seen to be important in determining the success of ESP courses. There has been no formal survey of the needs and expectations of medical students in using English for specific purposes courses in the University of Medical Sciences. In order to know as much about the learners as possible, an investigation of the formal needs analysis of the medical students and instructors in their usage of academic English is important. These requirements will then serve as a guide to improve or expand the existing English programs, so that more effective English courses will be created for the medical students in the future. This research addresses the issue of learners and instructors' inclinations and desires of the most problems of ESP classes in the University of medicine. The investigation pointed at gathering such data from the students and their teachers at university and observing ESP classes to make informed decisions to ensure effective language learning.

Literature Review

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) is an approach to language teaching and learning which is based on learner needs (Hutchinson and Waters, 1996). Thus, ESP courses require special language programs that emphasize students' special needs enabling them to use English for communication in their own specialized fields. In other words, ESP is based on the students' specific needs. However, designing a course, finding appropriate materials, getting familiar with the subject knowledge, or conducting the needs

analysis might be challenging for many new ESP teachers. Problems of English for Specific Purpose courses are: they are being offered without advanced planning in course design, systematic needs analysis, teacher education, time, textbooks, and systematic research on the effectiveness of these programs (Eslami, 2010; Karimkhanlouei, 2012; Hayati, 2008). Despite the importance of ESP courses for students, especially medical students, there have been very rare studies that generally and specifically examined the English language needs of medical students. English has so far been taught without a systematic survey of the needs of the medical students (Eslami, 2010; Karimkhanlouei, 2012). So, careful examination of the expectations and observations of learners and instructors is seen to be important in determining the success of ESP courses. There has been no formal survey of the needs and expectations of medical students in using English for specific purposes courses in Tabriz University of Medical Sciences. In order to know as much about the learners as possible, an investigation of the formal needs analysis of the medical learners and instructors in their use of academic English is essential. These requirements will then assist as a guide to progress or expand the existing English programs so that more effective English courses will be created for medical students in the future.

Research Objectives

This paper addresses the learners' issues and ESP lecturers' preferences and expectations of the key problems of ESP classes in the Universities of medicine. The investigation aimed at congregating such data from the students and their lecturers at university and perceiving ESP classes to make informed decisions to certify effective language learning. Very few studies have considered the challenges that ESP teachers encounter when they develop or give a course. Without a doubt, ESP includes a totally different language that even the native speakers of English have some difficulties with teaching because teaching English requires special knowledge. This paper has been stimulated by the researchers' own teaching experience and it will be beneficial for those who are at the beginning of their ESP career and for those who are given a task to design an ESP course. This study

strives to investigate the challenges such as; choosing the teaching materials, designing a course, learners' needs and expectations, lack of collaboration with the subject teacher and classroom situations etc.

Methodology

This study was conducted at the medical faculty of the University of Medical Sciences in Myanmar. The analysis conducted in this study attained feedback from the students and the lecturers who are academically involved with these ESP students at the medical faculties of the University in Myanmar.

1. Research Design

Both quantitative and qualitative methods were considered to produce a more accurate interpretation of the facts. The qualitative approach was carried out via ESP class observation and semi-structured interviews with the ESP lecturers involved in teaching this ESP course. Firstly, classroom observation was conducted during an ESP lesson for medical students. Secondly, the semi-structured interviews were shown in the instructor's workplace. Respondents were inquired to comment on the substance of the course, the materials utilized, teachers' classroom practices, and common problems they experienced. With this instrument, teachers' insights about the program were obtained. The duration of the interviews varied from 15 to 25 minutes. As for the quantitative phase of this study, a questionnaire was designed to collect data. The questionnaire used in this study was constructed by the researcher according to other related studies. The items were ranked on a Likert Scale ranging from 1 (Don't agree) to 4 (Very much agree). Students who contributed to the present study were university students of medical sciences. Most of them were in their third year of study. A total of 77 students from the English for Specific Purpose course for medical Universities in Myanmar participated. The minimum age of the students was 19 and the maximum was 22. Most of the students were 20 years old. In total, 16 teachers (both male and female) participated in the study. They held Master's degrees with their age ranging from 34 to 52. The teacher participants' teaching experience was from 10 to 29 years. They had

taught ESP courses for students in medicine, dentistry, nursery and pharmacy faculties as well.

Results

The data from the questionnaires was evaluated by using the SPSS program, version 16. Mainly descriptive statistics were used. The mean, percent, frequency, and Standard Deviation of questions were obtained. The semi-structured interviews were conducted by instructors and their answers were tape-recorded. All reactions were recorded and after that interpreted into English. The interviews were subjected to content analysis. Data obtained from the ESP lecturers were characterized and discussed.

1. Observation of ESP Classes

This study is aimed at emphasizing the experiences of students in their ESP classes which is essential before designing the course or the materials of ESP.

Table 1

Students' Questionnaire Responses Towards Experiences of Students in their ESP Classes (n=77)

SN	Experiences of ESP classes	Calculation		Meaning
		Mean	SD	
1	The ESP course was held in traditional classes usually 50-100 students participated in each class.	2.50	1.03	A small impact upon the students' development
2	These classes took place twice a week.	2.56	1.08	A moderate impact upon the students' development
3	The teacher was making use of L2 to teach the content of the lesson.	2.32	1.09	A small impact upon the students' development
4	ESP instruction trained special vocabulary, reading and translating numerous texts.	2.51	1.14	A moderate impact upon the students' development

Table 1 (Continued)

SN	Experiences of ESP classes	Calculation		Meaning
		Mean	SD	
5	Medical Terminology and English for Medical Students' textbooks were used for teaching.	3.11	0.76	A moderate impact upon the students' development
6	The teacher taught based on the content of books and some new vocabulary.	3.10	0.82	A moderate impact upon the students' development
7	The teachers taught medical vocabulary with attention to listening and speaking skills.	3.22	0.66	A moderate impact upon the students' development
8	Communicative activities and authentic communication in real life were taught.	1.85	0.79	A small impact upon the students' development
9	The instruction was boring for us on the whole.	2.38	1.14	A moderate impact upon the students' development
10	Teachers pay attention to our needs and expectations.	2.23	1.08	A small impact upon the students' development
	Average	2.58	1.06	A moderate impact upon the students' development

Note. 1.00-1.75=No impact upon the students' development, 1.76-2.50=A small impact upon the students' development; 2.51-3.25=A moderate impact upon the students' development; 3.26-4.00=A large impact upon the students' development.

Results of observation towards ESP classes indicated that current ESP course which was held in traditional classes has a moderate impact upon the students' development (Average mean=2.58). The surrounding was pleasant but these classes were too busy as 50-100 students usually attended in each class. These classes took place twice a week. The teacher was making use of L1 to teach the content of the lesson. The teacher had authority in the classroom. ESP instruction was limited to training special vocabulary and

reading and translating numerous texts. Of course, such methods did not reflect students' interests and resulted in low motivation of learners and their poor participation. Medical Terminology and English for Medical students' textbooks were used for teaching (Mean=3.11). Whatever the teacher taught was based on the content of books and some new vocabularies. The teachers taught medical vocabulary with attention to listening and speaking skills (Mean=3.22). Communicative activities and authentic communication in real life were neglected, which is a big problem. The instruction was boring to the students on the whole. One of the negative effects of the teaching process was the monotonous style of the instruction which caused students to feel bored with the lesson. The results indicate that the students slightly agree with the methods of teaching (Mean=1.85). The majority of students think that teachers pay little attention to their needs and expectations (Mean=2.23). Participants do not agree that the teacher was making use of L2 to teach the content of the lesson (Mean=2.32).

2. Interview Survey

The purpose of this study is to study the most common challenges that the teachers of ESP face while developing an ESP course, during the teaching process from the interview survey. The survey was conducted with 16 participants all of whom were ESP teachers.

Table 2

Teachers' Interview Responses Towards Problems of English for Specific Purpose Courses in Myanmar (n=16)

SN	Theme	Interviewee	Sample responses
1	Teachers' insights about the program	Interviewee 1	Teachers regarded English language as important in medical fields because science is changing and developing and English is the lingua franca of medical sciences.
		Interviewee 2	Students are being offered without advanced planning in course design, systematic needs analysis, and systematic research on the effectiveness of these programs.

Table 2 (Continued)

SN	Theme	Interviewee	Sample Responses
		Interviewee 3	Lack of consideration on teacher education, time allocation and appropriate textbooks are necessary for the changes in the medical students' English education.
2	General problems encountered	Interviewee 4	I agree with the current methods of teaching in ESP classes at the faculty of medicine but some of my colleagues did not. But all of us thought it could be on a better level and it should be improved.
		Interviewee 5	Problems of ESP classes include: size of class, uninterested and unmotivated students, tiredness of students, low proficiency of students, lack of audio-visual aids and inactivity of students in classes.
		Interviewee 6	Limited vocabulary, negative attitudes toward English, lack of availability of audio-visual materials, and outdated textbooks and materials were other areas in which there was a significant difference between the instructors and the students. Students perceived these problems as being more important than instructors did. On the other hand, instructors perceived the lack of student involvement and participation in class activities to be significantly more important than students did.

Table 2 (Continued)

SN	Theme	Interviewee	Sample Responses
3	Content of the course	Interviewee 7	From my point of view, the medical students had problems not only in reading skills but also in other skills: speaking, listening and writing. Although the medical students have been studying English for many years in schools, they still face problems in communicating in English, or coping with their English in other academic fields.
		Interviewee 8	More English courses which are academically specific to their field are urgently needed and in addition, all the macro skills (reading, writing, speaking and listening) and especially communication skills should be included in ESP course.
		Interviewee 9	Textbook contents inconsistent and inappropriate to students' actual situation.
4	Materials used	Interviewee 10	Lack of teaching materials and incomplete textbook content are a big issue for teaching ESP.
		Interviewee 11	In ESP courses now, most materials are designed to develop skills in listening, speaking, reading, writing and translation, but some teachers believe that a good vocabulary is enough for students.
		Interviewee 12	A number of textbooks developed by teachers do not bring students much interest because of focus on only reading skills and vocabulary exercises. Students often forget the learned words after each exam.

Table 2 (Continued)

SN	Theme	Interviewee	Sample Responses
5	Teachers' classroom practices	Interviewee 13	In studying any language, I think that the language classroom shouldn't be more than 25. Hence, the teacher can handle the class more effectively (e.g., correct students' mistakes, comment on students' performance and activity of students). It is also easier for the teacher to discuss with the students what they have been taught in the class or any other topics which may help enhance the students' knowledge. Of course, students have more opportunity to practice various skills or tasks in the classroom if the class size is small.
		Interviewee 14	Teaching ESP is still ineffective because teachers are not trained specialized knowledge. Many general English teachers admit that they cannot teach ESP because they themselves do not fully understand the specialized terminology.
		Interviewee 15	Teachers' qualifications and teaching methods are also big challenges for teaching ESP, especially the theoretical framework to support teaching it.

Table 2 shows the problems of English for Specific Purpose courses in Myanmar. Regarding teachers' insights about the program, the results of interviews with instructors indicated that teachers regarded the English language as important in medical fields because science is changing and developing and English is the lingua franca of medical sciences. Moreover, students should be offered advanced planning in course design, systematic needs analysis, and systematic research on the effectiveness of these programs. Participants discussed the need to consider teacher education,

time allocation, appropriate textbooks, and systematic research on the effectiveness of these programs. Instructors selected materials according to the needs of students, the authenticity of materials and books that were selected by the curriculum committee of the University. Some of the instructors had mentioned a few general problems encountered by them. According to them, very few instructors had innovative ideas for improving the quality of teaching of ESP. They emphasized that experimenting with new methods of English language teaching based on communicative language teaching should affect the methods of teaching in universities of Myanmar and teachers should try to avoid using traditional methods of teaching such as grammar and translation. General problems of ESP classes include the size of the class, uninterested and unmotivated students, tiredness of students, low proficiency of students, lack of audio-visual aids, and inactivity of students in classes. Most of the instructors believed that the inactivity of students was because of the low English language proficiency of medical students. All of the instructors believed that the main reason for low language proficiency was the poor instruction presented to students during 12 years of study at high schools in Myanmar. According to them, English instructors need to improve teachers' classroom practices because of the necessity of changes in the students' English education. Most of the instructors believed that size of the classes was one of the important problems.

3. Questionnaire Survey

Most of the participants had been teaching ESP for at least three years. The questionnaire contained 8 statements. The idea was to get as much data as possible on the challenges that ESP teachers come across before and during the teaching process.

Table 3

Questionnaire Responses of the Teachers Towards Problems Encountered in ESP Classes (n=16)

SN	Problems encountered in ESP classes	Calculation		Scale
		Mean	SD	
1	Boring classes are the first problem in ESP classes.	2.62	1.05	Having characteristics of a standard ESP class
2	My ESP classes are boring as I use outdated materials.	2.79	1.05	Having characteristics of a standard ESP class
3	The first problem in my ESP classes is low level of English language ability of students (English proficiency).	2.06	0.99	Slightly lower than having characteristics of a standard ESP class
4	My ESP classes are overcrowded.	2.30	0.96	Slightly lower than having characteristics of a standard ESP class
5	Boring classes are the first problem in ESP classes because my level of English knowledge is low.	2.30	1.08	Slightly lower than having characteristics of a standard ESP class
6	I think the students have limited vocabulary.	2.35	1.08	Slightly lower than having characteristics of a standard ESP class
7	ESP classes are boring because of the lack of classroom activities of students.	2.66	1.06	Having characteristics of a standard ESP class

Table 3 (Continued)

SN	Problems encountered in ESP classes	Calculation	Scale	Scale
		Mean	SD	
8	ESP classes are boring because of the lack of audiovisual materials.	3.11	0.93	Having characteristics of a standard ESP class
Average		2.52	1.07	Having characteristics of a standard ESP class

Note. 1.00-1.75=Much lower than having characteristics of a standard ESP class; 1.76-2.50=Slightly lower than having characteristics of a standard ESP class; 2.51-3.25=Having characteristics of a standard ESP class; 3.26-4.0=Higher than having characteristics of a standard ESP class.

Table 3 shows that participants think boring classes are the first problem in ESP classes (Mean=2.62). They think that a standard ESP class should have characteristics of using audiovisual materials (Mean=3.11), use of updated materials (Mean=2.79), and classroom activities of students (Mean=2.66). However, they have some difficulties in such areas that their students' level of English language skill of students (English proficiency) (Mean=2.06), over crowdedness of their ESP classes, and teachers' low level of English knowledge in ESP classes (Mean=2.30).

Discussion

Since an ESP course is a very severe one, teachers of ESP may face a lot of challenges not only generated by the lack of specific field knowledge, insufficient needs analysis in developing a course, or finding suitable materials for the course but also by unsupportive administrations as well. The teacher should be the classroom organizer and he should understand the carrier content of the teaching materials as well. ESP teachers need to be elastic so they should respond quickly to the issues which might come up in the lesson. Moreover, they need to take learners' suggestions about the

lessons into consideration and they should encourage the students to make their own materials as well. The outcomes of observation towards ESP classes show that the students slightly agree with methods of teaching in item 8 (Mean=1.85). The majority of students think that teachers pay little attention to their needs and expectations (Mean=2.23). Participants do not agree that the teacher was making use of L2 to teach the content of the lesson (Mean=2.32).

According to an interview survey with ESP lecturers, English language teaching faculty members believed that students do not participate in class activities as much as they should, and more teacher-centered classes are required to effectively teach large ESP classes. Another factor was that the students did not have much opportunity to use English in their daily lives. The situation in Myanmar does not support their English learning. Teachers might therefore need to apply diverse communicative activities in language classrooms to give EAP students opportunities to practice using English in a different context and focus more on self-regulated learning. To sum up the feedback of the opinions gained from the subjects towards their perception of ESP courses at the faculty of medicine, they all agreed that the current English courses provided for the medical students are not relevant to the academic needs of the students.

With regard to the English language problems that teachers were currently facing in their classes, lack of audio-visual aids, using outdated materials, and lack of classroom activities of students were evaluated as the main problems. The majority of instructors believed that the size of classes, uninterested and unmotivated students, inactivity, and low proficiency of students are also the problems in the ESP course. For the size of the class, the subjects selected overcrowded classes as the main problem. This agrees with the idea that the fewer students, the better the teaching/learning. But in actual situations, there are more than 30 students (usually 50–100) in the classroom.

Recommendations

In order to minimize the effects of the challenges in ESP, the practitioner should start from an in-depth needs analysis and design the course materials according to the needs and expectations of the learners. Even though an ESP teacher may not be an expert, he/she can overcome most of the challenges by reading some literature about the professional field of the learners that will develop their ability and also by cooperating with the subject teacher which will, in turn, make the teachers more familiar with the content knowledge. Thus, it is recommended that during the process of designing an ESP course, each step should be discussed with and approved by the administration beforehand. Otherwise, any changes during the course might not be welcomed by the administration, as they might require changes in the number of the lessons or materials which already have been decided before the course.

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