



Do English Courses Offered at Kermanshah University of Medical Sciences Fulfill Students Future Needs?

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Abstract

The paper evaluates students' perspectives on, and their future needs for, English courses offered at Kermanshah University of Medical Sciences to find any matches or mismatches. A survey study was carried out to evaluate the efficiency of two courses: General English and English for Specific Purpose. Attitudinal questionnaires were administered and three groups of participants -160 students, 5 teachers and 10 graduates- were interviewed. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyze the data. For all questions, descriptive statistics displaying frequencies and percentages were employed. The priority order of some Likert - scale items was analyzed with calculating mean rank through Friedman test. *t* - test was used to compare the calculated mean of some items with a specified value. Results showed that most students consider all the skills and sub - skills of utmost significance for their success in their current and future careers. Overall, teachers and students as well as employed graduate students complained about the English courses offered at Kermanshah University of Medical Sciences and see no or very few matches between the English courses offered and students' future needs. Finally, we conclude that administrators, teachers, and curriculum designers should revise both General English and English for Specific Purpose courses based on required and specified needs of the students, and that pedagogical materials be selected accordingly.

Keywords: Curriculum, Medical Students, Kermanshah University

1. Background

English plays an important role in medical studies because students have to study medical textbooks and journals that are mostly written in English. English for medical purposes can be considered as one of the main and the most flourishing sub-branches of English for Specific Purpose (ESP). Self-evaluation and assessment are vital procedures for a future successful career. Self-evaluation and assessment encourage students, teachers and designers of materials to set new goals, improve learning methods, and define their own strengths and weakness.

Shomoossi et al., in their study on the perspectives of nursing students in Iran on the efficacy of national English programs, concluded that the courses offered did not match with the future professional demands of the practitioners, and recommended revision of the English curricula (1).

In another study by Javid and Umer on Saudi medical undergraduate students, the authors recommended that English departments and instructors need to assess learn-

ers' proficiency in different language skills using standard English language proficiency tests before developing ESP syllabi (2). The present study tries to answer the following questions:

- RQ1: What is the Kermanshah University of Medical Sciences (KUMS)' level of proficiency in English based on students' opinions?
- RQ2: How important is it for students to use the four skills of English (listening, speaking, writing, and reading) and their different aspects for KUMS in their studies and careers?
- RQ3: How do the teachers and employed graduated students (EGS) evaluate the courses offered at KUMS?

2. Methods

This study is a survey in which three groups of participants took part. The selection of the first group that

comprised 160 students was based on proportional stratified sampling. The second group had five teachers teaching at KUMS who had a mean of 7 years of teaching experience of ESP and General English (GE) courses at KUMS, and the third group consisted of 10 EGS. Two instruments were used to gather data. The first was a questionnaire adapted from Basturkmen (3) and two earlier survey instruments by Chia (4) and Yang (5). The questionnaire was validated through content analysis by both medical and English teachers. The reliability of the questionnaire was 0.82.

The second instrument was an interview to get the opinions of the teachers and EGS on the English courses offered at KUMS. The interview, done via telephone, was semi-structured and had three questions. Participants were required to answer to the first question first and if the answer to the first question was either yes or no, they were asked to determine the degree of the mismatches/matches in this regard. Finally, they were required to provide their suggestions in this regard too.

SPSS 21 was used to analyze the data. Different statistical techniques (both descriptive and inferential) were applied. First, for all questions, descriptive statistics displaying frequencies and percentages were employed. The priority order of some Likert-scale items was analyzed with calculating mean rank through Friedman test. *t*-test was used to compare the calculated mean of some items with a specified value (the specified value used for comparison is the standard determined by ACTFL (American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages) proficiency guidelines).

3. Results

Results demonstrated that most students perceived their English proficiency in all skills and sub-skills as fair, they face difficulty in all skills (mostly in reading and speaking) and sub-skills (mostly in vocabulary) and they consider English as very important for both current and future needs (Table 1). The interview results show that all five teachers unanimously agreed that both GE and ESP courses offered are not appropriate and are not in accordance with the specified needs of both current and future careers of the students. They also maintain that the current English proficiency level of the students is very low. In addition, they asserted that the GE and ESP courses offered need thorough revision so as to fulfil both current and future needs of the students. Besides, 10 EGS interviewed maintained that the GE and ESP courses do not meet the students' fu-

ture needs and they saw no or very little match between English courses and students' future needs. They also, like the teachers, suggested that English courses and text books as well as methodology should undergo radical revision and changes.

4. Discussion

KUMS students perceive their level in English skills and sub-skills as "fair". However, much research (Alharby (6); Hashemi & Radmehr (7); Javid & Umer (2); Hwang & Lin (8)) and the author's personal interactions with KUMS students as an English teacher showed that students usually report exaggerated, and perceived their proficiency higher than their real level. The students' English proficiency is not at a satisfactory level. The results also show that limited vocabulary and poor speaking are the most important problems in their medical studies. A probable reason for this finding might be that having a rich vocabulary and reading skills is inevitable in medical studies, and good proficiency in speaking is needed for their medical success. Another reason might be that these skills have not been emphasized enough in the ESP syllabus at KUMS. These results are consistent with the findings of Alharby (6), Onder (9), and Faraj (10), but contradict the findings of Javid and Umer (2) who reported that students had high proficiency in reading, and grammar was the most difficult area for them. On the importance of English in general, and skills and sub-skills in particular, the results confirm the findings of Basturkmen (3), Hwang & Lin (8), and Javid & Umer (2) that writing was not very important for medical students. As teachers and EGS maintained, radical revision of the courses is required at KUMS for the students to make a balance between what they should study and what they need in future careers.

4.1. Conclusion

A standard proficiency test should be considered as part of a student's university entrance exam, and accordingly students should be categorized into different classes based on their English levels; different ESP syllabi should be designed for different classes. The ESP instructors should deliver the course in English to help the students improve their proficiency in different skills and sub-skills; traditional approaches to teaching should be avoided. It is better to allocate a special time to fostering students' proficiency in reading and writing medical research papers. As the students' level of proficiency is not satisfactory at KUMS, some preparatory courses in GE should be provided at the beginning of their studies.

Table 1. Comparison of ACTFL with Items Such as Proficiency Level, the Importance of English, and the Importance of Each Skill for Students (i = 160)

Parameters	Mean \pm SD	t	P Value	Mean Difference
Proficiency				
Students' level of proficiency	2.82 \pm 0.732	-3.120	< 0.001	-0.18
Importance of English				
Medical studies	4.25 \pm 0.801	19.741	< 0.001	1.25
Future career	4.43 \pm 0.814	22.252	< 0.001	1.43
Success in academic studies	4.13 \pm 0.998	14.343	< 0.001	1.13
Fostering students' discussion skills in class or meetings	3.74 \pm 0.992	9.483	< 0.001	0.744
Importance of skills				
Listening	3.98 \pm 0.842	14.727	< 0.001	0.981
Speaking	3.99 \pm 1.146	10.964	< 0.001	0.99
Writing	3.68 \pm 1.371	6.287	< 0.001	0.68
Reading	4.09 \pm 1.066	12.901	< 0.001	1.09

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