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Attitudes of Medical Students towards English Language Learning In Yemen.

Abdul Ghafour Ahmad Anajar*.

Assistance Professor of English, Faculty of Education, Taiz University, Yemen.

ABSTRACT

This paper outlines the results of a survey which was carried out to identify medical students' attitudes towards the English language learning in Medical College, Taiz University, Yemen. The study investigated students' attitudes in terms of four aspects: studying purposes, difficulties they encounter when they study English, what they like to do when they study English, and some general remarks. The study sample consisted of 120 medical students of level two at Taiz University. A 30 item, which were put in a 5 point likert scale format, questionnaire and interviews on 7 medical doctors and 3 teachers of English language were used for data collection. Data for the students attitudes revealed that most of students had positive attitudes towards the value of English and English educational needs. In addition, the findings showed the students' positive goals towards English language learning as a means to master the medical specialization. However, most of the participants were not satisfied with their performance in English in general which is mostly related to the type of the courses being taught and because of many other pedagogical reasons.

Keywords: attitudes, Medical students, language learning, Yemen

**Corresponding author*

INTRODUCTION

In higher education, all over the world, English plays an important role. A significant aspect of language instruction on the higher education level is learning English for a given purpose with the specific aims of acquiring specialized vocabulary and how to increase one's knowledge about the subject matter by using the four language skills, the receptive listening and reading and the productive writing and speaking. The most important thing is to be able to use the language in the prospective profession or study area by becoming prepared for some common situations such as conducting professional communication (varnosfardani 2009). The English language that medical students need should be related to the purpose for which students are expected to use language during and after their studies. Medical students' English language proficiency is a significant standard in their achievements and employment (Mehri & Taghi 2015). So their attitude towards learning English will be of a great help to study their subject matter and help in their career in the future. Identifying the attitude of the students is crucial for both the learner and the academic program (Inal et al 2003). Moreover, attitude towards language learning plays a crucial role in language learning as it influences learners' success or failure (Zainol Abidin, et al, 2012).

As a teacher of English at Taiz University and teacher of medical students for more than six years, the English courses given to the students of medicine are offered without advanced planning. Neither the content of the courses nor the expected needs of the learners were taken into considerations. Moreover, there is no systematic research on the effectiveness of these programs to make required changes in these courses. In addition, English courses are taught without a systematic survey of the needs of medical students. Students with positive attitudes will try harder to learn the language by using strategies like questioning, volunteering information, and answering questions (Baker 1992). Therefore, examining the attitudes and expectations of the medical students is important to determine the required needs and to make the courses more effective and successful. In order to achieve this, an investigation of the learners attitudes is essential. The outcomes of this investigation will help as a guide to improve and update the available English courses so that they will be more effective in the future. This paper addresses issues of medical students attitudes to English language learning offered to them through the English courses taught in medical college of Taiz University. The data collected from this investigation will help in making decisions to improve the English courses and the teaching and learning process as well.

The situation of teaching English in Yemeni context is very complicated as there is not even a separation between ESP and EGP when talking about syllabuses and methodology. English language courses in Yemeni Universities suffer from a number of problems and drawbacks. First, the time allotted is rather insufficient. It often varies between one hour and a half and three hours a week per class. Second, classes suffer from overcrowding. Third, opportunities to practice English outside classes are scarce even later on when students become employees. Fourth, most of the students think their problem lies in vocabulary, whereas in reality they have more difficulty with reading comprehension, grammar and writing. Thabet (2010) summarizes the problems that university Yemeni ESP teachers encounter in the following points:

- The poor level of the students specially those of self-finance.
- The inability to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the English courses because of no collaboration between ESP teachers and subject teachers
- Most ESP teachers are part-time and most of them are from outside the university.
- The overloaded timetable of the students with subjects of the specific field,
- The underpaid problem.
- The unavailability of resources

According to the researcher's experience, the large number of students in the classroom is a noticeable problem. This factor negatively influences the work of the language teachers in general and ESP teachers in particular and affects their performance. The main subjects are arranged at the favorable time of the day while the ESP classes take the 'extra' time left.

Students studying for different professions were taught more or less General English, which is not always very helpful when applied in real-life situations in the different fields of study, such as engineering, tourism, science and technology, and medicine.

At the tertiary level, English is taught as a specialized field in English departments in Yemeni Universities (i.e., Arts, languages and Education colleges), but, unfortunately, is dominated by many literature courses, and there are many other requirement courses that are totally taught in Arabic. English is also taught as a requirement for one year or two years in the other colleges.

The English courses in all the Yemeni Universities are proficiency courses, and their main purpose is to improve the English proficiency of the learners. "On the basis of a close examination of these courses, it is maintained that they fall within ESP" (Moharram, 2004). ESP has not yet acquired a prominent status in Yemeni Institutions at tertiary education, and it may be said that it is still in its infancy. These courses are generally known as English 101 and English 102. Some colleges add other courses such as English 103 and English 104 and they are mostly offered in as compulsory preparatory courses. These courses are taught in the first and second year in all humanities and scientific colleges. The courses are supposed to be ESP courses based on the special subjects to be taught. Teachers in charge of teaching these courses prepare or select passages that suit the section they are teaching in. Some teachers use Arabic language so that the students hardly develop any English language skills let alone the ESP skills.

METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted at the medical college of Taiz University. Due to constraints in terms of time, distance and accessibility, a questionnaire is used to obtain feedback from the medical students who are academically involved with these English courses. Moreover, a semi-structured interview was conducted to obtain feedback from the teachers who teach medical subjects and those who teach EMP courses. Both quantitative and qualitative methods were used to produce a more accurate interpretation of the data. The qualitative method was carried out using semi-structured interviews with medical teachers who held PhD degrees in Anatomy, Biochemistry, Epidemiology, pathology, and neurology. In total, they are seven teachers, five male and two female. The participants' teaching experiences varied from nine to twelve years. In addition, three English language teachers who teach English courses, in medical departments, were also interviewed. Respondents were asked to comment on the students' English proficiency, the classroom problems they encountered when using English, the materials used, the language of instruction they are using, the medical students attitudes and needs in using English language and their insights about the program of English courses obtained. The interviews were conducted in the medical teachers' offices and each interview took between 15 to 20 minutes in non-consecutive six days.

Concerning the quantitative part of this study, a questionnaire was used to collect the data. It is taken, with some amendment, from Mehri & Taghi (2015). The items were ranked on a Likert Scale ranging from (strongly agree) to (strongly disagree). The validity of the questionnaire was evaluated by content validity. The participants included in this study were 120 medical students and they were all from level two students at faculty of Medicine, Taiz University, 90 (75%) were female and 30 (25%) were male. Their ages ranged from 22 to 25. The 2nd year medical students are chosen because they have just taken the English courses in the first year of their study so that they can provide good and precise feedback as well as ideas regarding the English language courses they have taken and their real needs in this regard.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The data from the questionnaire was analyzed and the semi-structured interviews were conducted and answers were recorded down. Data obtained from the students were categorized and discussed. Results of interviews indicated that language used by medical learners is a combination of students' native language (Arabic Language) and the English Language. The reasons behind using this combination are, according to the medical teachers responses, the students sometimes don't understand the instructions and the content of the medical subjects when using only pure English. This is due to the less proficiency of English the students possess. Two of medical teachers indicated that they had studied in countries which belonged to USSR in which the language of instruction was not English. Therefore, they prefer to use the medical language along with the students' native language. This raises a new point in which the medical teachers themselves have less proficiency in using English language as the language of instruction.

One of the medical doctors, the bio-chemistry teacher, said I always prefer to use the medical terms and when I write medical reports I find Russian language is easier to use than English language. Thus, as a teacher I am using the students' native language when teaching the content of the lecture. Results of interviews of ESP teachers indicated that the English courses which were given to medical students were not designed in advance to suit the needs of medical students. The decision of choosing the course was left to the English language teacher. Therefore, the teachers mostly choose courses from the internet or the library regardless of the suitability of them either from the level, the style or the content. English language courses in medical college were taught in levels one and two and they were four courses, one each term. That was the system in the first four years when the medical college was opened. The English courses were then reduced to only two for level one only. The interviews also indicated that each level in medical college is divided into two groups A and B. For some subjects such as English, the two groups are put in one class. This means a very crowded class with nearly 150 students. The excuse of the college is to save the expenses of the university and the vivid roaster. However, in a crowded class like this the students don't get the chance and the time to participate adequately and effectively. Moreover, the teacher finds difficulties to involve many students in the activities and tasks done in the class.

Results of the questionnaire showed that most of the students who participated in this study were second year medical students. From all the students participating in the study, of a total 120, 90 (75%) were female and 30 (25%) were male. The questionnaire is classified into four parts. It is worth mentioning here that the four sections of the questionnaire were classified and categorized after collecting data from the respondents. One discusses the difficulties the medical students encounter when they study English, the next part discusses the things the students like when they study English, then the students express the purposes of learning English, and finally some general information concerning learning are included. Each part is discussed in more details in the following paragraphs. The first part discusses the difficulties that medical students face when they practice speaking English in the class and anywhere, how do they feel when they attend English classes and their skills in summarizing the lesson into points. The following table (1) exhibits the responses of participants.

Table (1): English Difficulties Medical Students Encounter

N.	Item	Strongly agree/%	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Total
1	Speaking English anywhere makes me feel worried.	38 32%	27 23%	17 14%	13 11%	25 25%	120
6	I'm not relaxed whenever I have to speak in my English class.	86 72%	31 26%	0 0%	0 0%	3 3%	120
9	I don't feel enthusiastic to come to English class.	32 27%	14 12%	2 2%	27 23%	45 45%	120
16	I can't summarize the important points of most English lessons that I have studied.	3 3%	14 12%	21 18%	53 44%	29 29%	120
19	I'm not satisfied with my performance in English subject.	73 61%	34 28%	13 11%	0 0%	0 0%	120

From the table above, (38% & 27%) strongly agree and agree respectively to the item "speaking English anywhere makes me feel worried". This indicates that the participants find difficulties in speaking English. According the researcher's experience, most of the students say when they hear someone speaks in English, they understand most of the speech. However, they find the difficulty to respond using English. This is

a clear indication that the participants need to improve the speaking skills. Most of the participants (72% & 26%) strongly agree and agree to the idea that they don't feel relaxed when they have to speak in their English classes. This also reinforces the same idea. That is, the university students find difficulties in speaking skills. The idea is that the English language courses taught in the schools are focusing more on writing and reading. The researcher conducted a master thesis on a pedagogic evaluation of English language courses taught in public schools. The outcomes of the research showed that speaking and listening skills get less lessons and less activities in all the English Course for Yemen (ECY) series and in all levels (Anajar, 2008). Nearly most participants have the enthusiasm to come to English classes as they would like to improve their performance in English in general. When talking about writing skills, nearly the majority of the participants showed the ability to summarize the points they had studied which means they don't have more difficulties in writing. Finally, most of the participants don't feel satisfied with their performance in English language which is really an important point the most of the Yemeni university students would raise.

Table (2): Things the MS like to do when they study English

N.	Item	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Total
2	I like to give opinions during English lessons.	44 37%	12 10%	15 13%	33 28%	16 16%	120
4	I like to practice speaking English with students (classmates) in the class.	93 78%	13 11%	5 4%	9 8%	0 0%	120
7	I like to practice English the way native speakers do.	71 59%	34 28%	9 8%	4 3%	2 2%	120
13	I like my English class and look forward to studying more English in the future.	67 56%	38 32%	6 5%	9 8%	0 0%	120
22	I don't get anxious when I have to answer a question in English class.	13 11%	3 3%	74 62%	19 16%	11 11%	120
25	I enjoy doing activities in English	93 78%	13 11%	0 0%	4 3%	10 10%	120
29	To be honest, I really have interest in my English class.	7 6%	9 8%	83 69%	21 18%	0 0%	120

Table (2) discusses the required responses the students like to do when they take English lessons. Most students (37%) like to give opinions during English lessons and (78%) strongly agree that they like to practice speaking English with students in the class. As a future goal, the students like to practice the way native speakers do (71%). Most students (56%) strongly agree that they like English classes and look forward to study more English in the future. The above three statements show that the students motives for the future are promising and positive. While in the previous section, when they come to performance and practice the answers were totally negative. The students responses, to the idea that they don't get anxious when they have to answer questions, are neutral 62% which means that they are in between.

The following table (3) aims to cover the students purposes for learning English language.

Table (3): Medical Students' Studying Purposes

N.	Item	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	disagree	Strongly disagree	Total
5	Studying English makes me have more confidence in expressing myself.	86 72%	31 26%	0 0%	0 0%	3 3%	120
11	Studying English is important because it'll make me more educated.	84 70%	35 29%	0 0%	1 1%	0 0%	120
12	I get more knowledge and more understanding when studying English.	25 21%	22 18%	17 14%	50 42%	6 6%	120
14	Frankly, I study English just to pass the exam.	13 11%	12 10%	21 18%	41 34%	33 33%	120
15	In my opinion, those who speak more than one language are very knowledgeable.	11 9%	19 16%	71 59%	9 8%	10 10%	120
17	Studying English helps me communicate effectively.	73 61%	41 34%	4 3%	0 0%	2 2%	120
23	Studying foreign languages like English is enjoyable.	87 73%	29 24%	0 0%	4 3%	0 0%	120
24	Studying English makes me have good emotions/feelings	4 3%	11 9%	37 31%	37 31%	31 31%	120
28	Studying English subject makes me feel more confident	27 23%	31 26%	1 1%	37 31%	24 24%	120
30	Mastering English language is an important goal in my life.	91 76%	29 24%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	120

According to the table (3) above (72%&70%) of students learn English to get more confidence and education respectively. In practice, 42% of the students disagree to the item "I get more knowledge and more understanding when studying English", while (21%&18%) agree and strongly agree respectively to the same item. Nearly those who agree are equal to those who disagree in the aforementioned item. The idea is that, those who get knowledge in English find the courses they take are just general. The researcher related this to the type of courses being used as well as the insufficient courses given to medical students. Most of medical students (34% & 33%) disagree and strongly disagree to take English courses only for passing the exams as an objective. Nearly most of the participants (59%) were neutral to the idea of relationship between bilingual or multilingual and its relation with more knowledge.

One of the important objectives for studying English is to communicate effectively (61%&34%) strongly agree and agree respectively. To study English courses is a means to feel more confident.

The number of students who strongly agree (23%) and (26%) agree is nearly the same to those who disagree (31%) and strongly disagree (24%). This indicate that those who agree and strongly agree with the view that they can express their competence and be more confident in their career with the help of English. Those with the other view what is important to them is the competence in their specialization .Most participants (76% &24%) strongly agree and agree to master English in the future as a goal.

Medical students general opinions

The following table (4) exhibits the responses of the medical students concerning general opinions on English language learning.

Table (4) Medical students general opinions

N.	Item	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	disagree	Strongly disagree	Total
3	I'm able to pay attention during studying English.	61 51%	13 11%	0	23 19%	23 23%	120
8	When I miss the class, I never ask my friends or teacher for what has been taught and the homework.	13 11%	11 9%	28 23%	4 3%	64 64%	120
10	I don't pay any attention when my English teacher is explaining the lesson.	7 6%	17 14%	8 7%	41 34%	47 47%	120
18	I'm able to think and analyze the content in English language.	27 23%	13 11%	72 60%	0	8 8%	120
20	In my opinion, English language is difficult and complicated to learn.	64 53%	21 18%	7 6%	13 11%	15 15%	120
21	I feel excited when I communicate in English with others.	13 11%	3 3%	74 62%	19 16%	11 11%	120
26	I do not like studying English	0 0%	3 3%	22 18%	3 3%	92 92%	120

According to the responses of the participants in the table above, nearly (51% & 11%) strongly agree and agree that they pay attention to lesson classes which indicates they have interest to master English language. The participants also showed interest in English language classes so they ask what the teacher had explained and the assignments given when they missed the classes. Most medical students who participated in this study also payed more attention when the teacher was explaining the lessons. The participants were not competent enough to think and analyze the content in English language. This means they were not having the skills required in English language to do so. Most of the participants consider English language as difficult language to learn and this maybe because they didn't get the required basics that would enable them to use the language easily. For example, and according to the researcher experience, most of the students did not know any idea about the phonetic sounds which are of a great help to learners to speak words correctly. The truth is that medical students need to have the skills to learn most of the words and know as usual four things about the words they learn. That is, the meaning, the spelling, the pronunciation, and the part of speech. Nearly (74%) who chose neutral to the item 21 which asks the participants to say whether they feel exited when they communicate in English language. The idea is that they are in between which means that they are not competent enough in speaking skills. Finally, most of the learners would like to learn English language which is mostly the goal of each and every university student.

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