TEACHING ENGLISH FOR MEDICINE AS AN APPROACH APPLIED TO LANGUAGE FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES IN BENIN HEALTH SCHOOLS

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Abstract : The English language, due to its role in the world today, has become the cornerstone of higher education development. One’s ability to speak specific English to his domain is a good asset required by job market and scientific research. The present study sought to point out the difficulties and challenges to ESP teaching-learning at medical schools. To that perspective, 150 respondents split into 100 medical learners, 20 ESP teachers and 30 healthcare professionals have been sampled from Medico -Social Training School (EFMS) of Parakou to participate in the survey. Data have been collected through questionnaires, interviews and class observation. The analysis performed with SPSS software showed that teachers are faced with lack of modern teaching materials, learners’ demotivation in classes and large class size. The courses’ contents do not fit the learners’ needs as well as the teaching method adopted by teachers.

Keywords: English for medicine, approach, specialty, Benin, health schools

Résumé : La langue anglaise, en raison de son rôle dans le monde d’aujourd’hui, est devenue la pierre angulaire du progrès de l’enseignement supérieur. La capacité à parler l’anglais spécifique dans son domaine est un bon atout requis par le marché du travail et de la recherche scientifique. La présente étude visait à ressortir les difficultés et les défis de l’enseignement-apprentissage de l’Anglais spécifique dans les formations médicales. Dans cette perspective, 150 répondants répartis en 100 apprenants, 20 enseignants d’anglais de spécialité et 30 professionnels de santé ont été échantillonnés à l’Ecole de Formation Medico - Social (EFMS) de Parakou pour participer à l’enquête. Les données ont été recueillies au moyen de questionnaires, d’interviews et de visite de classe. L’analyse réalisée avec le logiciel SPSS a montré que les enseignants sont confrontés au manque de matériels d’enseignement modernes, à la démobilisation des apprenants dans les classes et à la taille importante des classes. Aussi, le contenu des cours ne correspond pas aux besoins des apprenants ainsi qu’à la méthode d’enseignement adoptée par les enseignants.

Mots clés : Anglais médical, approche, spécialité, Benin, écoles de santé.
Introduction

Language is a tool of communication. It designs particularly the manner of expressing ideas and feeling either through speech or written, even through gestures. English in Benin environment is a foreign language, and it is one of the most essential international languages for communication (Endriyati et al. 2019). It is the language of communication and business, worldwide. It is used in many domains and enterprises where it is used as a medium of exchange. English is very important in getting a better job and in social interaction with people around the world (Sari et al., 2020).

Due to its indispensable position in profession, more and more companies require English proficiency from applicants (Azoua Hounnou, 2023). Then, the ability to speak specific English is a very good asset for getting job opportunity. Indeed, English for Specific Purposes (ESP) is English language instruction designed to meet the specific learning needs of a specific learner or group, within a specific time frame for which instruction in general English will not suffice (Beer, 2015).

Accordingly, people need to learn specific language for taking part in conferences, to communicate with international professionals of native countries, etc. Then, learning English as foreign language (EFL), involves both general and specific needs. In that perspective, specific English learners are supposed to have the basic use of English communication. Strevens (1988) separated the concepts of absolute characteristics and variables characterization in the learning and teaching of ESP. From that perspective, the language for specialty must be directed as follows:

- Elaborated to be in the streamline of the major study field
- Linked to the most problematic issues in the options and professions
- Centered the options and professions
- Opposed to general language

Dealing with variables in the characterization, language for specific study needs to be:

- Tackled strictly in the majors to be acquired
- Not to delivered regarding with specific methods

Moreover, the two absolute determinants Robinson (1991) in the process of determination of the modules in ESP are as follows:

- Objective - oriented
- Derivative from analysis from the lacks, wants, necessities and needs

Unfortunately, general English language is not yet well understood by most of Beninese EFL learners and ESP learners particularly. They have significant lack in grammar, conjugating, and vocabulary. Moreover, the majority
meets difficulty in formulating good sentences and can’t keep in oral discussion. However, ESP teaching and learning goes along with general English.

In medical schools, students, after years of study, still feel important difficulty in using specific English. They are not able to communicate appropriately by using terminologies of their specialty whereas medical science is a universal science which uses English a lot as a medium of communication and treatment. Also, drugs, vaccines, surgical materials and other medical products’ labels are always or partly in English.

Also, such learners did not have advanced knowledge in medicine applied to the targeted language. They could have a Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) similarity. In contrary, they gained medical principles and knowledge from French language usage in teaching units constituents. As a consequence no one can use them accordingly without a good level at medical English.

Furthermore, international seminars, conferences and capacity building workshops led by international physicians are conducted in English. During such meetings, English is exclusively used, with sometimes no interpretation. This makes non speakers not to understand very well the exchanges and then they do not grasp the core message to be proficient in their job. The present research work points out the challenges and difficulties for an effective ESP teaching learning to medical learners.

1. **Context: English language learning as a necessity for health sector**

In medical sciences, the necessity of English is noticeable, and many learners can regret for not gaining competencies in English as a Foreign Language in the course of medical studies. The use of English during such studies become greater and greater. However, the different programs or curricula are very poor in some communities. It becomes difficult for learners and language instructors for effective assessment.

In medical schools, learners start classes by responding to questions on their language history. Consequently, students in medical domain need to search for scientific phenomenon in documents that are global on internet but naturally in English language. Most of such learners would like to have the higher proficiency in English to have good findings for their research work. Moreover, the compulsory situation of their fundamental knowledge in English is recommended.

In a normal standard, when learners registered for medical program, that means that their output is tended to be advanced intermediate where the traditional level gaining in secondary school must be completed in a due time.
It may be possible to meet fellows from other countries, mostly from English countries or Arabic ones which can only speak English during the academic year. Then, it will be unbearable that learners do not reinforce their capacity in English competences and keep speaking French for higher program to university. So, managing such lack at university is a must for EFL/ESL instructors.

Some categories or learners use translators softwares to face their scientific understand problems, but later on there will happen a context in which they are confronted to incorrectness of retrieval documents. As the wants or needs, and even it is difficult to arrange schedules between studying and learning English program for specificity, learners must manage to continue reading English without getting into trouble with their option in higher education like in medical schools.

Definitely, medical performances are enormously requested in all African and world communities. In contrast, what really affects such categories of learners is the way of communicating in English. Nowadays, medical students are obliged to read and master English for deeper understanding.

2. Objectives of the study

Learning English as a foreign language is considered to be a difficult task especially vocational school. Also, most of language instructors tend to teach English for general purposes in some specific field of study. They were sometimes involved in teaching vocabulary, language structuration or some language aspects learners do not need, or need them a little. They most of the time neglect the originality of the program required and recommended. In medical school, the majority of the students even after several years of studying English are not able to succeed properly in using it on specific field. So, the main purpose of this study is to pull out the strategies for teaching and learning English for specific purposes to medical beginner learners.

More specifically, the study intends:

- **Objective 1**: To find out the problems confronted by both teachers and learners in ESP classes at medical schools;
- **Objective 2**: To identify the language shortcomings confronted by medical professionals in their job.

2.1. Research Questions

To attain the above – mentioned objectives the following questions have guided the investigations.
**Question 1:** What problems do both teachers and learners face with in teaching/learning medical English in classes?

**Question 2:** What are the effects of those shortcomings on ESP teaching-learning effectiveness?

**Question 3:** How do teachers succeed in overcoming didactical and pedagogical issues in their teaching practices?

**Question 4:** What language difficulties do medical professionals encountered in their workplace?

### 2.2. Research hypotheses

In answering to these research questions, some hypotheses have been set to conduct the survey. They are as follows:

**Hypothesis 1:** Medical English teachers are confronted with short time dedicated to English classes, lack of training and incompetency whereas learners’ difficulties are mismatch of lectures with their domain needs, incapacity to communicate with patients from native country,

**Hypothesis 2:** Medical professionals lack knowledge in speaking and listening skills.

**Hypothesis 3:** The lack of specific vocabularies, concepts and terminologies to their domain leads medical students to misuse equipment, machines designed in English.

**Hypothesis 4:** Medical professionals are not able to converse with foreign patients and therefore do not to treat them accordingly.

### 3. Methodological approach

#### 3.1. Framework of the study

Medical school (EFMS) of the municipality of Parakou in North of Benin has served as setting to this research work. It trains learners in three domains: caregiver, sanitary technician social assistant. Parakou municipality is located in Borgou District, bordered in the South, East and West by Tchaourou municipality and in the North by N’Dali municipality.

- **Target population and sampling**

  Three categories of participants have constituted the target population to the study. They are ESP learners and teachers from EFMS school and the medical professionals from some hospitals in Borgou region. In sum, 150 respondents split into 100 medical learners, 20 ESP teachers and 30 healthcare professionals have been sampled through random selection on their willing. The students are 30 from level one, 30 from level 2 and 40 from level 3 while ESP teachers are 07,
07 and 06 respectively from level one, level two and level three. As far as professionals are concerned there were 10 doctors, 10 nurses and 10 midwives.

- Data collection procedures
  For data collection, techniques were used consisting in questionings, interviews and classroom observation. Then, questionnaire sheets have been accordingly designed and addressed to each participant for filling out. The questionnaires to learners intend to collect motivation toward English language and the difficulties faced in ESP classes. The ones addressed to ESP teachers help to collect challenges during classes as well as the teaching strategies deployed. As for professionals, questionnaires help to review the language constraints faced in their daily profession in hospitals. Learners filled in the questionnaires on the stage after translating items into French while teachers and professionals returned the sheets one week later.

  Individual interviews have been conducted with English teachers to have spoken responses about the different strategies adopted to help learners comprehending the courses. It aimed also to check some information included in the questionnaires so as to have reliable data.

  For class observation, it intends to collect behavioral data related to classroom atmosphere, teaching methods and the oral communication skills of the students.

3.2. Statistical analysis

Both qualitative and quantitative techniques have been used to process the data collected. Qualitative procedures encompassed contents and discourse analysis while the quantitative one consisted in descriptive statistics calculation. SPSS software was used as statistical tool for data analysis.

4. Findings presentation
4.1. Data from learners

The findings revealed that the students in totality recognize the usefulness of English language subject in their curriculum and hence its place in their future professional career. However, 80% disagreed to the teaching strategy used by EFL teachers in classes. For them, teachers do not stress on speaking and listening skills which are the most difficult skills to be developed. Also, 40% said that the course contents do not fit with their domains’ needs as well as the materials used. In fact, 50% asserted that they use rarely modern tools such as internet, podcasts, screen, videos, etc.
The results also show that 75% of the students are confronted to foreign patients during their internship at the hospitals against 25% who never meet. As language used for consultation of foreign patients, only 10 use English language while 65% speak another language being French, Yoruba, Zerma, and others.

According to the majority, it is 90%, the inability to speak English is a handicap to a healthcare professional against 10% who found the opposite. Then, 80% of the students respondents asserted that they are very often confronted with machines or blocks note designed in English during internship at hospitals. Also, 20% met doctors or nurses who speak only English while the majority, that is 80% never meet during internship.

Mainly, the results have demonstrated that students in medical schools in priority need to build their reading in English language for the purposes of research works. Also, medical students need to develop speaking skills.

To that point, research works are major learning constituents for students in health schools. In real, without English reading and speaking programs, research for medicine domain is not possible at all. Not only for research but also for students’ in internship program for hospitals, proceeding about writing research and project drafting or job applications for overseas Medical Doctors (MD). The former opportunities domain revealed that the prospective MD are constraint to speak English with patients or hospitals ‘stakeholders. Since we all agree on the fact that the medical professionals originate from several communities around the globe and the patients or clients are also come from different areas.

4.2. Data from teachers

The findings from teachers showed that, 25% and 25% of the ESP teachers respectively have class one time a week and two times a week against 10, that is 50% of the teachers who have more than three times a week or deliver their courses in other periods. Each ESP class lasts maximum two hours. For all of them (100%), the amount of time allotted to EFL class is not sufficient to develop all the language skills required.

The majority: 80% said that they lack sufficient training in medical English against 20% who thought the opposite. While EFL classes, 50% found that students never interact during activities against 30% who found sometimes and 20% for always. Dealing with the teaching strategy, the majority: 60% use theory, 20% use practices and 20% combine the both to teach ESP to medical students. All of them, that is 100% said that they lack suitable materials to teach specific English although they recognize its great importance in medical service. They
complained of large class size, lack of motivation of learners as well as the non-use English language outside class.

Learning approaches as an act that learners take to support themselves by understanding or remembering the competences in specific language acquisition. Knowledge, know-how and the how-to of English for medical purposes by the medium of vocabulary approaches can help learners better control their own learning and the instructors teaching approaches.

To that perspective, learners are assisted when dealing with medical terms, concepts and terminologies they get across with in learning situations.

Therefore, we can count many classifications in vocabulary teaching/learning approaches developed by a lot of writers. Those approaches can be stated as follows:

- The cognition of learning linking to memory reflects the Direct approach and the metacognitive learning involves the Indirect approaches, Oxford (1990);
- The acquisition of new words through the imaginative strategies of learning contributes to the Discovery and consolidation approaches, Schmitt (1997);
- The determination of structural knowledge, the know-how and the how-to references the Dictionary and guessing approaches, Jones (2006);
- The taxonomy of exploiting some well-understood principles of psychological learning as the use of encoding, mental, rote, repetitive, visual and verbal techniques participates to Mnemonics approaches, (Brahler & Walker, 2007);
- The use of blank vocabulary learning technique applied to the contextualization of the learning situations is understood as the Pedagogical approaches, Hounnou Azoua (2020);
- The easiest way of learning terminologies and medical concepts by the medium of software reinforces the Mind mapping approaches, Al-Jarf (2010);
- The reminding process facilitating the action of retention of jargons, terms, terminologies and medical concepts represents the Video game approaches, Muller (2012).

Considering the approaches stated above, we can indicate that the most used approaches in our context are guessing, mnemonics and memory, mental and imaginary Jones (2006) and Schmitt (1997). These approaches are seen to be implemented in medical schools as a whole but in Benin as particular. This is in
line with the results of the study conducted by Seddigh and Shokrpur (2012) among medical sciences learners.

Fan (2003) on the same streamline affirmed that the approaches of guessing were among the most used approaches. This goes against results of Jones (2006), Seddigh and Shokrpur (2012) which finalized that numerous students prefer a bilingual dictionary.

Data from professionals

The data from professionals revealed that 100% of the professional respondents to the study know the important role of English language in their workplace. Yet, they unanimously said to have been confronted to language issue in the performance of their duties. 50% said to have been submitted once a month, 33% once a week and 17% every day. So as to better themselves at work, 67% of the professionals practice listening or hearing activity while 33 do not do. Among those who practice listening, 33% do it once a month, 17% once a week and 17% all day long.

Dealing with patients’ origin, 93% are confronted with native speaker patients while only 2 never meet. The results also revealed that half of them meet native speaker patients one time a month, 33% one-time weekly and 17% each day. Consequently, they answer all that not being able to speak English is a handicap to their job.

5. Discussion

The study showed that medical students are aware of English language importance in their profession and then are motivated in learning it. Because, as stated by Ammanni and Aparanjani (2016) language is the mirror of human life which dis-alienates the life of human. Nevertheless, 80% do not agree to the teaching methods adopted by EFL teachers.

Teachers do not use modern language teaching materials that can help students to develop their oral communication skills. In addition, the ESP handouts given to the medical students do not fit their specialty needs. Tazik and Aliakbari (2019) went beyond by stating in their research that teachers should take students’ individual differences and styles into account to achieve in EFL classes.

Furthermore, 75% of the learners meet foreign patients during their internship at the hospitals and only few that are 10% can speak English to treat them. Also, 20% of them collaborate with English doctors during internship. They found that the incapacity to speak specific English is a great weakness to their training.
This fact leads them most of the time to misuse medical machines or equipment when labels are in English. These observations have raised the problem of needs analysis that aimed to identify a particular learner’s or group of learners’ communicative needs and their learning styles and preferences. As a matter of fact by conducting learners’ needs assessment, the teacher is able to identify the learners’ future target tasks and, if necessary, change the syllabus, adapting it to the learners’ specific needs.

On the other hand, the study revealed that teachers complain of the short time of teaching. The majority of them have class one time or two times a week. Each class session lasts maximum 2 hours. This is not enough to enable students to better understand English and to be proficient at it since ESP language requires more effort that the general English (Yessoufou. & Segoh, 2019).

These results are similar to those of Serrano (2010) who admitted that students make more gains in intensive program. The majority, that is 80% said that they lack sufficient training in ESP teaching (Yessoufou. & Segoh, 2019).

Moreover, during classes, students do not interact. This proves students’ lack of motivation (Bahous and al. 2011). Because the majority of the teachers use theoretical ways to teach students. Only 20% use practical method consisting in using machines, describing human body organs, medical consultation notes, etc. to teach in ESP class. In addition, teachers complain of large class size and lack of school infrastructures (Meşe & Sevilen, 2021).

The study further showed that, medical professionals are confronted with language issue in their job. They deal with many patients from English - speaking countries such as Nigeria, Ghana, Cameroun and others with whom they should speak English. They unanimously said not being up to this. This result shows the weakness of their specific language leaning.

Conclusion

The present study revealed the challenges and difficulties in ESP teaching at medical secondary school (EFMS) of Parakou. The findings show that ESP teachers meet some difficulties in EFL classes such as lack of materials, students’ non participation to classroom activities, students’ lower level of general English. For students, teachers do not make their teaching methods and courses match with their needs. These observations have raised teachers’ lack of training and showed the undeniability of needs assessment in ESP class. Moreover, medical professionals meet important language issues in their workplace because they receive most of the time foreign patients to treat. The study calls for school authorities’ responsibility upon the ESP teaching at vocational schools.
Bibliographical references


