

**THE OPTIONS FOR TEACHER COOPERATION  
IN ENGLISH FOR MEDICAL PURPOSES**  
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***Abstract:** One of the principles of the methodology of English for Special Purposes is that language classes should closely reflect students' areas of interest. This puts forward content-based instruction and language teachers are expected to increase their knowledge of the content area, find materials and resources that generate student interest and involvement and build intrinsic motivation and knowledge.*

*This brings us to the question concerning the level of knowledge that language teachers should have of their students' specialized subjects. A possible solution is team and/or tandem teaching, a form of cooperation between language teachers and discipline-specific teachers. This method introduces the necessary contents, helps determine the target situations with more precision, as well as the tasks and outcomes of teaching.*

*The need for team and tandem teaching is particularly important in the field of medicine which is constantly developing. Here, the medical teacher could provide invaluable information concerning relevant medical knowledge, materials and skills to be included in a language class. On the other hand, they can benefit from this cooperation as language teachers contribute by supplying the necessary methodology and linguistic knowledge in order to create a course that would meet students' needs.*

*Tandem teaching promotes the relationship between subject teachers, language teachers and students by integrating medical knowledge and English language teaching.*

***Key words:** English for Medical Purposes, medical content, team and tandem teaching, learning in context*

### **Introduction**

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) is described as the most vibrant and innovative area of language teaching (Hyland, 1999). It emphasizes practical outcomes by preparing students to communicate effectively in the tasks prescribed by their study or work situation.

One of the basic distinctions between ESP and General English (GE) is the insistence on specialized vocabulary. However, it needs to be emphasized that ESP is not only a set of specific vocabulary to be added to the learner's store of GE. ESP students are often adults whose interests, motivation and learning styles are different from the usually young learners of GE. As adult learners, students of ESP have already chosen their principal fields of study (such as medicine, law, business, etc.) and they are usually well aware of the situations in which they will be using English in the future. Consequently, they are interested in knowing

whether the tasks, activities and experiences the teacher provides will help them develop their language skills and perform their duties effectively in the chosen field.

Language education that is related to the professional interests of the learners attracts more students to study language because they see the connection between their career aspirations and second language knowledge. Therefore, ESP implies a somewhat different approach to methodology, syllabus design and materials production. For example, students in English for Medical Purposes (EMP) might require instruction in medical topics, doctor-patient interactions, and dealing with medical literature in English. In EMP, tasks and activities should cater for the learners' communicative needs: simulation, role playing, case studies, information transfer, presentations, etc. Target-language interactions among students are important for developing communicative skills in the second language (Pica et al., 1989).

Some of the issues that this situation puts forward include the possibilities for integrating content with language teaching, as one of the ways for conducting an efficient ESP course and leads us to the question of the level of knowledge that language teachers should have of their students' specialized subjects. Furthermore, it brings into consideration the opportunity to include both students and discipline-specific teachers as a source of invaluable content, thus creating a foundation for mutual cooperation that could benefit all the parties included in the process.

### **The principles of adult learning**

Before going into the specifics of the topic at hand, it is necessary to briefly discuss and justify the course of actions taken in creating and conducting a suitable ESP/EMP course. As it has been stated, ESP learners are adults who have specific needs with respect to language learning. They are different from learners of GE in that they are:

- self-directed: they like to have control over their own learning. They need to know the purpose and the benefits of learning before they enter the learning process;
- motivated: their motivation to learn comes not only from external but also from internal factors (e.g. career aspirations, satisfaction, self-esteem, etc.);
- experienced: they draw upon past experiences to help their learning. They use their previous experience in many areas, different learning styles and strategies, they bring in their expectations in terms of teaching styles and methodologies;
- ready to learn: their readiness is related to the assumption of new roles. They are ready to learn because they perceive the need to acquire new knowledge in order to be able to cope more effectively with real-life situations;

- oriented: they want to apply new knowledge immediately in problem-solving. They are particularly motivated if they see the knowledge and skills they acquire can be applied practically in real-life situations.

Adult learners need to know *why* they are learning something. They learn through problem-solving and through doing. Most importantly, they learn when the knowledge is of immediate use.

All these characteristics need to be considered when designing the course and suitable methods and approaches should be applied in order to meet the learners' needs which is one of the basic goals of English for Specific Purposes.

### **EMP course components**

It is often the case that language teachers find themselves teaching not only language skills but also professional skills. In English for Medical Purposes, professional skills involve the practical things that medical professionals have to do in their working lives – giving presentations, participating in meetings, discussing diagnoses, communicating with patients, socializing with medical staff, reading relevant literature in English, writing scientific research papers, etc. They need to be incorporated into the syllabus along with the language skills that are regularly included – speaking, listening, reading and writing.

In terms of vocabulary, the course encompasses general and specialist medical vocabulary. General medical vocabulary is usually the one found in a medical English coursebook and it includes basic terms related to body organs and systems, vocabulary used to describe trends (for example, *increase*, *decrease*, *drop*, *rise*), words used in everyday communication with patients. On the other hand, specialist vocabulary is very specific to the learners' future jobs and the industry they are going to work in. It is not commonly found in coursebooks and it is laden with expert terms used in professional communication with other experts and members of the medical discourse community. It is commonly found in expert texts, diagnoses, laboratory findings, discharge summaries, research papers, etc.

An EMP course starts with the general medical vocabulary, at the same time introducing the principles of word formation (prefixes, suffixes, compound words, etc.) in order to enable students to build towards the specialist medical vocabulary and achieve independence in understanding and using the complex medical terminology. In addition, the four language skills are integrated with the medical skills.

All the linguistic elements and teaching activities are put into medical context. The contextualization enables students to readily perceive the relation between language learning and their future professions. Teaching aims to equip learners with competency in English which will be required from them in real life. Students practice English language skills by using language to perform real tasks in authentic contexts in which they must be willing to take risks inherent in expressing themselves in a foreign language and be resourceful in the use of vocabulary and structures to make themselves understood (Omaggio, 1986). The goal is to

allow learners to use the target language in meaningful, interactive and engaging ways (Koike and Hinojosa, 1998).

An example of such contextualized activity is a doctor-patient encounter. This communicative event is generally performed in the form of dialogues and role-plays. It enables students to practice the use of questions to extract information, to initiate communication, to summarize the main points, to draw conclusions, to use modals for various purposes (suggestions, uncertainties, advice, possibilities, etc.). Students also use the medical vocabulary they have learned and the emphasis is on the speaking skill. This activity may be further developed by transforming the dialogues into case studies where the students write case presentations based on the information they have obtained from the doctor-patient interview or based on cases they have encountered during their medical classes. The use of case studies offers numerous advantages for teaching as they involve problem-based learning and promote the development of analytical skills (Herreid and Schiller, 2011). Case studies also promote group discussions and solving complex problems thus moving beyond recall of knowledge to higher cognitive skills such as analysis, evaluation and application (Anderson and Krathwohl, 2000; Herreid, 1994) Another very important feature of case studies is that they promote interdisciplinary learning and enable the integration of different medical subjects into the English language classes.

What can be observed from these examples is the fact that medical content plays an important role in EMP. Essentially, content-based learning implies that students are learning *about* a subject matter using the English language as a tool for developing knowledge. Language teaching and subject matter are, once again, integrated and this is a motivating combination. Students are given an opportunity to apply their medical knowledge during English classes and even improve their ability to learn English. The process is reciprocal in that it may also enable them to use what they have learned during English classes to broaden their medical knowledge.

### **Teacher cooperation and team teaching**

In ESP/EMP, teachers are no longer seen as the primary vessels of knowledge. They can have several roles among which are teaching, course designing, providing materials, collaborating, advising, facilitating, researching and evaluating. Particularly with content-based instruction, the students may know more about the content than the teacher and their knowledge can be used to generate communication in the classroom. Even if teaching is not completely related to content, it should always reflect the underlying concepts and activities of the broad discipline.

Therefore, one of the questions that arises concerns the level of knowledge that a language teacher should have about the students' subject areas. One of the first studies of teacher knowledge (Shulman, 1987) put forwards two concepts:

1. general pedagogical knowledge which includes principles and strategies of classroom management and organization, and
2. pedagogical content knowledge which integrates the content knowledge of a specific subject and the pedagogical knowledge for teaching that particular subject.

As experts in language and teaching methodology, medical English teachers already possess the required pedagogical background. However, in order to merge the pedagogy and the medical content, it is not necessary for them to be experts in medicine. What is required is knowledge of the fundamental principles of the subject area, an active interest in the disciplines or professional activities the students are involved in and a thorough understanding of the specific jobs the students are going to perform (Svendsen and Krebs, 1984; Jackson, 2005; Brown, 1995). That way, teachers gain familiarity with the work of their students and discover the communication difficulties they may confront (Stein, 1995; Jackson, 2005). The teacher's role is that of an advisor or a counselor who is knowledgeable in communication practices and negotiates with students on how these practices can best be applied to meet the teaching objectives.

EMP is a practical discipline and its most important objective is to help students to learn. Language teachers may face challenges related to the content (Johns & Price-Machado, 2001) and they may feel the need to establish a cooperation with subject specialists in order to achieve meaningful communication in the class and the sharing of knowledge (Hutchinson and Waters, 1987). This form of interdisciplinary cooperation and coordination, called team or tandem teaching, may be presented in the form of a functional triangle or a three-way dialogue which includes language teachers, medical teachers and medical students (Antic, 2015). This mutual collaboration promotes the relationship between the three parties and it is essential for the process to be successful and for learning to be as effective as possible. Each participant has an important role: the students initially define their learning needs and then, together with the medical teachers, they bring in the important content knowledge, whereas the language teacher does not have to deal with the actual subject content but works as an intermediary who puts the elements together into a meaningful whole. This approach integrates medicine and English language teaching and learning, students learn in context and they are motivated to apply their medical knowledge during language classes (Antic, 2008).

Furthermore, the cooperation is beneficial for medical teachers as well. They are essentially doctors or teaching assistants who have very little, if any, formal training in pedagogy and teaching methodology. For many, their practice has been learned solely by doing or it relies on the traditional, nowadays outdated, *ex-cathedra* teaching. Here, they are given an opportunity to learn from the language teachers about the methodological aspects of course design, the use of various teaching methods, approaches and principles, and later use this knowledge and enrich their regular classes. Even if it only inspires them to think about and reflect on their teaching practice, it will eventually lead towards improvement (Moon,

1999). Therefore, team and tandem teaching is very important as it offers a myriad of opportunities for development of all the parties included.

### **Conclusion**

Courses in ESP are most commonly conducted with adult learners. They have already chosen their basic field of study and, in terms of language learning, they have very specific demands because they know where they will be using the English language and, consequently, they know what they want to learn.

In English for Medical Purposes, context and content have very important roles in course design. The integration of medicine and language learning is one of the most beneficial ways to improve performance and achieve better student outcomes. The language teacher is expected to meet the course requirements and, most importantly, students' language learning needs.

Since the course aims at developing language and skills in the context of medicine, it is natural that language teachers should possess at least some general knowledge of their students' major subjects. Teachers can take advantage of their linguistic and pedagogical background as well as use their students' knowledge of medicine that they bring to the classes. Furthermore, the contribution from medical teachers in team teaching is of utter importance and a combination of all these elements will provide a solid ground for successful learning and development of all the participants in the educational process.

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