

## EXPLORING STUDENT EXPECTATIONS AND PERCEPTIONS IN ENGLISH FOR MEDICAL PURPOSES (EMP)

ILINA DOYKOVA

*This survey evaluates the current EMP course effectiveness from the students' perspective and establishes the degree of adaptation of the course content to the learner needs. Our aim is to update the structure of the traditional textbook and to integrate new elements in the English language programme through linguistic tasks and delivery of specialized content for self-study. By creating a flexible learning environment and incorporating the multiple opportunities of the blended learning approach we expect to raise the interest level and to address the individual needs of students with multiple levels of English language competence.*

*An EMP seminar typically comprises of a short theoretical tutorial on a topic of professional interest and a language practice part. Due to time constraints the classroom seminars followed the textbook structure, while for the reinforcement of the specific vocabulary listening, reading and video materials were published on the Blackboard learning platform to supplement the textbook. The re-engagement of students with higher levels of language competence was based on more complex reading comprehension tasks, paraphrasing, summarizing, and presenting activities. Students of lower language competence were exposed to guided grammar and vocabulary practice.*

*Feedback was collected from second-year students in English for Dental Medicine and the survey analysis highlighted the value of teaching resources in the learning process.*

**Keywords:** *blended learning, English for Dental Medicine, survey analysis*

### Introduction

English for Medical Purposes as a branch of ESP is offered to students in Medicine, Dental Medicine and Pharmacy programmes to develop communicative skills and language competence for the purposes of academic study, communication and research. The present paper investigates the EMP teaching materials, the EMP course, and the learning needs from the students' perspective. The purpose is to collect students' feedback and their suggestions for optimization of the EMP syllabus as part of the learner-centered approach, adopted at the Medical University of Varna. A combination of teaching practices was employed during the EMP course such as competence-oriented, task-based, 'flipped classroom' and academic style instruction for raising learner motivation and achievement results.

### The EMP programme for Dental medicine

The EMP course provides guided classroom instruction (textbook-based) and supplementary resources for 60 hours of instruction in the course of one academic year. The EMP classroom introduced several challenges for the instructor such as the need for an update and adjustment of the course content to the learner needs, selection of authentic materials, design of appropriate tasks for various levels of language competence, integration of multimedia and the available Internet-based platform for elearning (Blackboard), as well as designing computer-based tests for midterm and final assessment.

Due to time constraints the course emphasis was on the delivery of clear and concise content with materials for further practice, published on Blackboard as self-study resources. The idea was to create a flexible EMP course content, supporting students' progress with terminology, specialized vocabulary and the discursive patterns of English for Dental medicine. Our concerns were whether the provided study materials were stimulating (Hutchinson, Waters, 1992) and encouraging learning

(Lewis, Hill, 2003). Considering the multifaceted aspects of learning and teaching EMP, the aim was to measure the effect of the EMP course as a summative result based on a textbook, selected Internet sources, and Blackboard teaching materials. The students' perceptions of the classroom practice are considered important in view of the course update and its applicability for various learner levels and needs as four language competence levels were represented in 2017/2018 academic year: A2 (16 students), B1 (27 students), B2 (19 students), and C1 (8 students).

#### Method and data collection

The active role of the students and their ideas are considered essential ingredients in the elaboration of the course content (Nunan, 1993). Therefore, the survey of the EMP course effectiveness was based on post-course evaluation in the form of self-assessment and a Likert-scale questionnaire, completed by 70 second-year students (aged 19-21). The quantitative data were gathered from 20 questions and the average results were grouped in five categories (Strongly disagree, Disagree, Neutral, Agree, and Strongly agree) to which ordinal values from 1-5 were assigned for each variable. Low values were considered areas for improvement and medium values were defined as appropriate. Additionally, the students had the opportunity to express their opinions by providing an open-ended answer to every question. These answers were analyzed and similar concepts with common characteristics were clustered into themes.

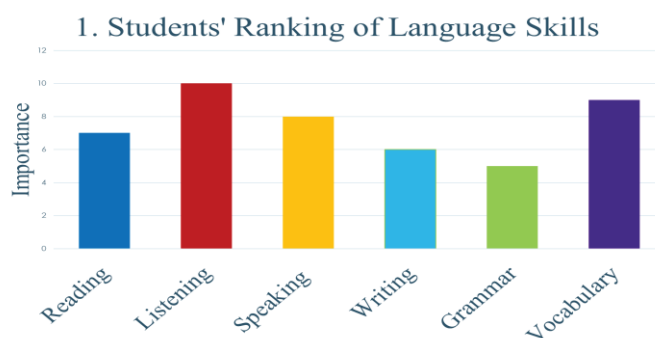
#### Self-assessment and feedback

The first step was to establish the students' expectations from the EMP course (Table 1).

**Table 1.** Students expectations from an EMP course

1. Increase my ESP vocabulary/learn dental terminology in English	26
2. Practice my English language skills / carry out communicative activities	12
3. Discuss professional topics of common interest	11
4. Listen to dentistry-related audio material	8
5. Watch dentistry-related video material	7
6. Read and understand professional texts	6
7. Improve my grammar	5
8. Learn to move from informal to formal register	4

The students were asked to rank their individual preference for foreign language skills and core academic elements such as grammar and vocabulary acquisition (Fig. 1).

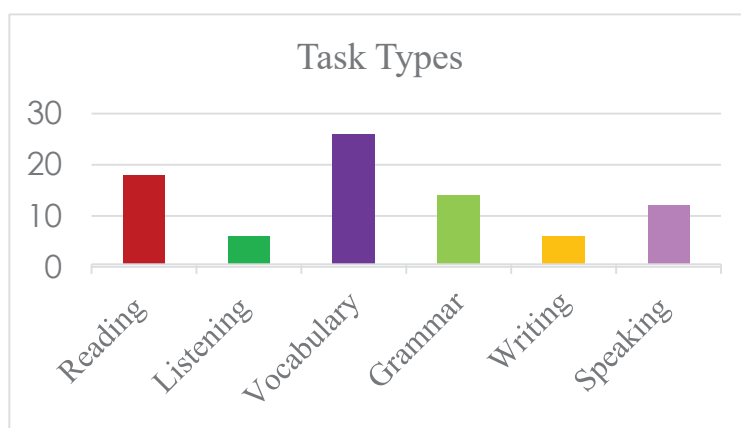


**Fig. 1.** Importance of foreign language skills – the students' perspective

Listening and speaking comprehension together with vocabulary development occupied the top three positions. Their importance was emphasized for the following reasons:

1. *working with international patients*
2. *learning about and discussing new research and innovations in DM*
3. *just practicing my language skills*

As a next step, the EMP course content and the opportunities to develop language skills in class were ranked as relevant by 33 participants in the survey. Another 18 students considered the course easier than expected and stated that they were not challenged enough. A third group of 12 students marked the course as more difficult than expected and 8 indicated that it did not meet their expectations. The task types were estimated at medium-difficulty (39 students), relatively easy (16), elementary (8), and difficult (7). The students were conscious about the strengths of the textbook and the emphasis on language skills such as reading and vocabulary acquisition (Figure 2) at language level B1.



**Fig. 2.** Usefulness of textbook-based tasks

In view of the non-homogeneous groups, the individual needs were identified (Table 2).

**Table 2.** Needs analysis

I HAVE DIFFICULTY	Students	I NEED	Students
Reading professional texts	38	Higher language level	34
Speaking on certain topics in DM	32	New topics	27
Using specific vocabulary	31	Topical vocabulary lists	14
Listening to authentic videos	29	Other:	12
Revising and learning grammar	27	(+/-) tempo, listening & speaking	
Writing assignments	19	practice, time, smaller class size	
Pronunciation	9	Topics delivered by students	5

The preference for certain activities as well as the additional instructional materials were also evaluated and commented upon. Most students preferred the lexical tasks such as use of English, followed by listening (video) and reading comprehension. Thus, the task types that should be given priority are listening to authentic video tutorials (21), vocabulary and terminology development (19), group discussions and sharing opinions on interesting topics (11), and extra reading (10). Several students indicated that they had serious difficulties with terminology and academic lexis which prevented them from being active in the discussions. A few (6) expressed their concerns about writing tasks such as summarizing, paraphrasing and quoting and the need for relevant instruction on

reshaping information when using the works of others in their assignments (Table 3). The Blackboard materials were rated as interesting and engaging (18), useful (10), excellent (6) or of no importance (3).

**Table 3.** Students preference for classroom and Blackboard activities

I AVOID	Students	I LIKE	Students
The repetitive topics	13	Authentic reading and listening tasks	21
The textbook	9	Variety of topics and lexical scope	19
The exercises	8	Discussions/sharing opinion on topics	11
The doctor-patient dialogues	6	Blackboard materials for self-study	10
The writing tasks	5	Tasks to retain/keep-up my language skills	6
The theoretical information	3	Delivery mode, friendly atmosphere	3

The next survey question focused on the selection of EMP topics. The students featured certain units from the obligatory course content and marked the textbook titles in order of their preference. The overall selection of topics was estimated as good (28), satisfactory (21), and to be updated (13). Three students mentioned that the textbook topics do not follow/match the disciplines studied in 2nd year.

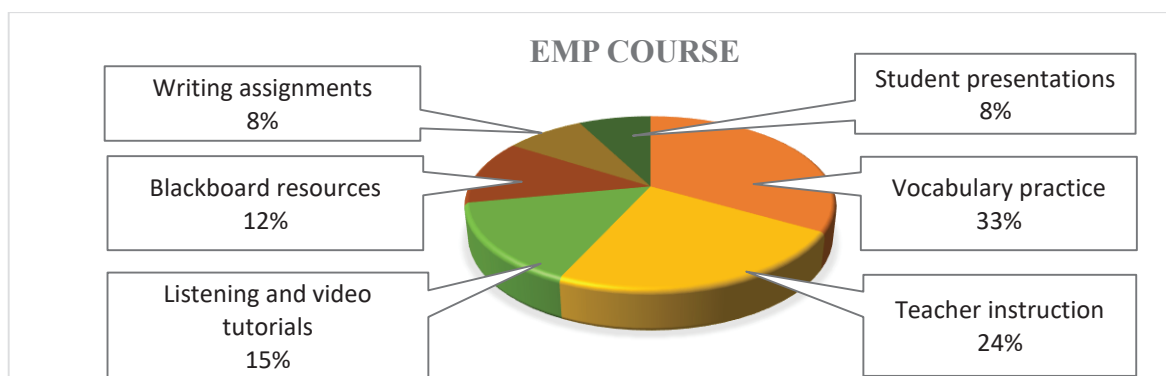
New discipline - specific topics including doctor-patient communication (rights, responsibilities, prohibitions, psychological aspects), doctor hygiene and safety, recent innovations, cosmetic and aesthetic dentistry and further issues in the field of Dental medicine were suggested by 22 students: *Dental Instruments, How Dentists Protect Themselves, Tooth Anomalies, Pregnancy and Dental Care, Bleeding in Dentistry, Dental CAD/CAM Systems, Communication strategies with patients, Mouth Diseases from A to Z, Dental Patient Safety, Dental Sealants, 3-D Printing, etc.*

The most important part of the student feedback were the ideas for the EMP course optimization (summarized in Table 4).

**Table 4.** Ideas for an EMP course management

Priorities	Students
Use of English: listening tasks, video tutorials, flashcards	17
Speaking activities: group discussions, role-play	15
Reading comprehension: for homework	9
Grammar and vocabulary extension: on Blackboard	8
Engagement in group presentations & follow-up discussions: in class	7
Team-work projects	3

The highly ranked or featured activities during the 2017-2018 course in English for Dental medicine may serve as guidelines for a prospective EMP course design (Fig. 3).



**Fig.3.** EMP course structure

The overall ranking of the EMP course content is represented as summative result of the individual values assigned by the survey participants (Tables 5, 6, and 7).

**Table 5.** EMP course feedback

1. I was provided with sufficient opportunities to practice my <b>reading</b> skills.	193
2. I improved my <b>vocabulary</b> in the EMP course.	191
3. I improved my <b>reading</b> skills in the EMP course.	188
4. I was provided with sufficient opportunities to practice my <b>listening</b> skills.	162
5. I was provided with sufficient opportunities to practice my <b>writing</b> skills.	104
6. I was provided with sufficient opportunities to practice my <b>speaking</b> skills.	69
7. I was provided with sufficient opportunities to practice my <b>vocabulary</b> .	57
8. I improved my <b>listening</b> skills in the EMP course.	55
9. I improved my <b>speaking</b> skills in the EMP course.	43
10. I improved my <b>writing</b> skills in the EMP course.	39

**Table 6.** EMP course materials and instruction

11. The provided instructional materials were sufficient.	188
12. The topics in the EMP course were interesting/engaging.	177
13. A variety of audio-visual aids were used.	163
14. Instruction was mostly in English with a small proportion of Bulgarian.	160
15. I would like to focus on	
Collocations (e.g. perform an experiment, administer an injection)	164
Use of prepositions (e.g. comply with, subject to)	160
Use of conjunctions (e.g. although, thus)	146
Passive voice (e.g. the patient was diagnosed)	146
Modal verbs (e.g. may, shall)	145
Word formation (e.g. oblige – obligation – obligatory)	145

**Table 7.** EMP testing and assessment

16. Assignments and tests were graded fairly and thoroughly.	187
17. I had enough time to complete the tasks.	183
18. The content is directly linked to the course content and instruction.	167
19. In order to consolidate what I have learned I mainly intend to	
use the available Blackboard resources and the textbook	136
read articles and websites on topics I am interested in	129
listen & watch the video clips	119
revise/tidy up my notes	107
do grammar practice	119
do some listening practice	104

The EMP course provides for the development of language competence in specialized English and the final assessment of student achievement of learning outcomes. The seminars proved challenging for 40% of the students (levels A2 and B1) who claimed to be generally more interested in the final exam results. Due to time and class size constraints, such practically-oriented students limited their efforts to the acquisition of core lexical items, presented and practiced in class. In the opinion of the students (12), the teacher/instructor was an important factor in the learning process (*patient, supportive, etc.*).

#### Conclusions

This survey reveals the degree of relevance between students' foreign language needs and interests and an EMP course. Behind an effective EMP course is a continuous process of questioning and establishing what works best. To rely on a textbook or ready-made solutions is unrealistic in a mixed language competence classroom. Even though lower level students feel comfortable with a textbook, the choice may lead to less consideration of the digital students' needs who may not get appropriate training. The flexible approach, described in this paper allowed for a custom-made structure and contents of the EMP module (a textbook, online and Blackboard resources) towards greater homogeneity in students' attitudes and their active involvement in the learning process.

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#### Contact details

Ilina Tsvetanova Doykova is an associate professor of EMP at MU-Varna, Department of Foreign Languages, Communication and Sports. Her main academic interests are technology enhanced learning, corpus linguistics, and scientific communication in English.

E-mail: [ilina.doykova@mu-varna.bg](mailto:ilina.doykova@mu-varna.bg)