

## THE IMPLEMENTATION OF STRATEGIES FOR ENHANCING STUDENTS' COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE IN MEDICAL ENGLISH COURSE

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In the contemporary world, English is considered to be the dominant language of communication in the field of medicine. The aim of this paper is to present specific features of the Medical English course indispensable for the successful education and professional development of medical students. It is believed that an integrative and interdisciplinary approach in which the student is at the centre of the teaching/learning process is the fundamental aspect of the Medical English course. Therefore, students should be encouraged to adapt and upgrade the language skills applicable in future professional setting. The English language learning strategies at the tertiary level include acquiring medical terminology, upgrading oral and written communication, and following medical literature. Moreover, Medical English practitioners should combine different approaches based on their experience leading to the most appropriate teaching outcomes.

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**Key words:** Medical English, medical terminology, professional development, teaching/learning process, language skills

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### Introduction

In the contemporary world, English is considered to be the dominant language of communication in the field of medicine. It is used as the primary means of communication between medical experts, which leads to the uniformity of science and scientific language. It is characterized by specific linguistic features and requires a specialized language teaching methodology which can be applied by using a specifically designed programme (1).

It is believed that an integrative and interdisciplinary approach in which the student is at the centre of the learning process is the fundamental aspect of teaching English for medical purposes (EMP). This approach is based on the authenticity and cooperation between the EMP practitioner and the students, as well as between the students themselves (2). In addition, students should be prepared for long-term learning, i.e. learning that will

continue after the completion of the Medical English course.

### Fundamental features of English for medical purposes course

The English for medical purposes course needs to satisfy the requirements of modern methodological principles at the tertiary level in being a student-centred approach directed towards the interests of the students and their future professional careers. The goals of EMP teaching generally include broadening content-based knowledge and developing the ability to communicate using appropriate linguistic tools.

Therefore, it is very important to begin the process of designing an adequate programme by performing the needs analysis that will determine the current level of knowledge, motivation, and previous learning methods. Accordingly, this information will help the EMP practitioner adjust the curriculum using different methodological approaches (3).

In this context, the role of the EMP practitioner is to prepare students for their future studies and enhance their motivation. This implies that medical students should adopt specific medical vocabulary, improve oral and written communication in English, and apply the language in various work-related situations (4).

### Communicative tasks in EMP teaching

Communication tasks that await students in the professional future include:

- The interaction with professionals including cooperation with medical staff, writing and presenting case reports, referring to a specialist, and professional consultations;
- The interaction with patients consisting of history taking, performing a physical exam, explaining diagnostic procedures and medical conditions, and establishing treatment plans;
- The academic interaction encompassing reading and writing journal articles, participating in conference presentations, and discussions;

The instruction in any of the above categories may form the solid basis of an EMP curriculum that is in accordance with the students' needs (5).

### **Task-based language teaching**

Task-based language teaching (TBLT) focuses on performing different tasks using the target language. The evaluation is based more on the appropriate achievement of real-life tasks than on the correctness of the given language structures. In this way, students develop target language fluency and strengthen self-confidence (6). The main elements of a task include pragmatic meaning; the information gap, the reasoning gap, the opinion gap, and linguistic resources needed to complete the task (7).

It is commonly believed that task-based learning consists of three stages:

- a *pre-task stage* in which the topic is defined and the students participate in activities that enable them to acquire the vocabulary relevant for the accomplishment of the main task;
- a *task cycle* in which the students perform the task in pairs or small groups and then prepare a report in which they explain how they completed the task, and
- *the language focus stage* in which specific language features are highlighted.

The aim of such a model is to make students incorporate all four language skills and become more fluent and accurate. The language is used in the medical context and the emphasis is on communication (8).

### **The use of simulation in EMP teaching**

Following the principles of the student-centred approach, the aim of simulations is to make students active participants in the teaching/learning process. In other words, students experience the activity directly rather than hearing about it. The simulation is open-ended, implying a variety of possible answers to the problems students are required to solve. Therefore, simulations depend on the decisions made and the actions taken.

Simulations reflect a real-life situation in which students undertake roles as they analyze data, make decisions and solve the problems essential to the given situation. As the simulation proceeds, students respond to the changes within the situation by analyzing the ramifications of their decisions and subsequent actions and predicting future problems (9).

Simulations motivate students by keeping them engaged in the problem-solving and decision-making. In addition, they advocate critical thinking and help students upgrade knowledge by actively participating in student-student or practitioner-student conversations needed to conduct a simulation and transfer knowledge to new problems and situations (10).

### **Problem-based learning**

Problem-based learning (PBL) focuses on the integration of language and content study to facilitate autonomous learning. The underlying principle is that students learn better if the presented content is familiar to them. The PBL emphasizes the acquisition of content knowledge aiming at a high level of communication among learners of the same group. The PBL was initially developed for medical education and has then been extended to other disciplines. The process allows students to develop skills used for their future practice.

The PBL tutorial process involves working in small groups of students. Each student takes on a role within the group that may often revolve. It is directed towards the student's reflection and reasoning to create their learning environment (11). Students should be encouraged to take on the problem, and develop and improve strategies for individual learning and team work (12). In this way, they increase responsibility for their learning which will help them to further progress in their primary field of expertise.

### **Project-based learning**

Project-based learning emphasizes authentic learning tasks established in the personal interests of learners. It is a systematic teaching method that engages students in acquiring knowledge and skills through an extensive investigation constructed around intricate and meticulously selected issues (13).

In the context of EMP, project-based learning aims at bringing the workplace environment into the lectures (14). The project work enables the students to put their medical knowledge into the context of English, which is a source of great motivation. The best projects call upon the prior knowledge and expertise of each student. They are aware of the purpose and relevance since they acquire the knowledge necessary for their future area of expertise. In the process of preparing the projects, students may consult experts in the core courses and come up with great ideas. An example of the project - based learning would be asking students to search for information and make a comparison between health-care systems in different countries of the European Union and their own country.

### **Conclusion**

Due to the rapid development of medical science and language teaching methodology, Medical English teaching represents a challenging job requiring myriad skills from language instructors. Not

only should they be facilitators of the teaching process creating conditions for learning, but they should also assist students in acquiring the knowledge necessary to promote their professional development. In line with this, designing a Medical English course is a highly motivating process calling for the productive exchange of ideas between teachers and

students, close collaboration with teachers of the core courses, and continuous evaluation to create a curriculum specially designed for the medical profession. Moreover, Medical English practitioners should combine different approaches based on their experience leading to the most appropriate teaching outcomes.

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Pregledni rad

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## PRIMENA STRATEGIJA ZA UNAPREĐENJE KOMUNIKATIVNE KOMPETENCIJE STUDENATA U NASTAVI ENGLESKOG JEZIKA ZA POTREBE MEDICINE

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Smatra se da je engleski jezik danas dominantni jezik komunikacije u oblasti medicine. Cilj ovog rada je da predstavi specifičnosti nastave engleskog jezika u oblasti medicine, neophodne za uspešno obrazovanje i profesionalni razvoj studenata medicine. Integralni i interdisciplinarni pristup, u kojem je student u centru procesa učenja, predstavlja osnovni aspekt nastave engleskog jezika za potrebe medicine. Zbog toga studente treba podsticati da usvajaju i usavršavaju jezičke veštine primenljive u budućem profesionalnom okruženju. U strategije učenja engleskog jezika na akademskom nivou spadaju usvajanje medicinske terminologije, savladavanje usmene i pismene komunikacije, kao i praćenje medicinske literature. Štaviše, profesori engleskog jezika za potrebe studenata medicine treba da kombinuju različite pristupe zasnovane na svom iskustvu, koji bi doveli do najboljih mogućih rezultata.

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**Ključne reči:** medicinski engleski jezik, medicinska terminologija, profesionalni razvoj, jezičke veštine