

TEACHING ENGLISH TO MEDICAL STUDENTS IN VIETNAM

*MLIS. Nguyen Dang Ha**

ABSTRACT

Medical English (Med Eng) allows medical students to better prepare for their future career as well as exchange their knowledge with the world. This article points out some methods that can be used to teach this subject for medical students in Vietnam, in which the author believes that an appropriate class and curriculum should be designed so as to increase the interactions of students in the class, thus improving their speaking skill. All the while, new technologies should be used to encourage them to self-study.

1. INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, English has become the principal lingua franca for communication in both business and scientific fields. However, each field/profession requires a different type of English that is highly specialized. Thus, English for Specific Purposes (ESP) is taught to students in many universities around the world for their career preparation. An ESP course focuses on the English language in the context of a particular occupation such as medicine, business, biology, technical English, and so on.

Regarding Vietnamese medical students, it is essential to master English besides their specialized degrees. Since most of the medical textbooks, research papers, and articles are written in English, they will need English to approach the advanced knowledge of health care professionals worldwide. Furthermore, in the time of globalization when citizens can easily live, work, or travel to other countries, future doctors are required to use English to communicate with their colleagues as well as patients. Teaching English for Medical Purposes (EMP), therefore, has always been a matter of concern for higher education that offer medical training. Especially, with the advent of the internet and new technologies, the method of teaching EMP needs to be changed and adapted.

In Vietnam, every medical university or institute provides EMP courses for their students. And those students are well-aware of the importance of learning Medical English to integrate

* Nguyen Dang Ha, MLIS, School of Medicine, Tan Tao University (TTU), Long An

themselves into the international medical community. Although most of them have good reading skills and could access knowledge on the radio and TV, their chief problem lies in understanding spoken English and speaking it. (Kerry Goulston, Professor Emeritus in Medicine, University of Sydney). Thus, tackling this problem is one of the priorities of Medical English teaching in Vietnam.

2. METHODS OF TEACHING ENGLISH FOR MEDICAL STUDENTS

2.1. Designing the classes

Many studies show that a large number of students in the class can limit the possibility of students to interact with others and thus, leaving them with less space to practice speaking English in the class. What is more, placing students with different levels of English in the same class may cause problems for the teacher in preparing materials and demotivate students since the lessons are too difficult for some students while too easy for others. As a result of this, we need to first and foremost designate a suitable number of students in the class – the ideal situation being around 15-20 students/class. Second, students should be placed based on their English proficiency, which can be implemented by requiring students to take an entrance examination test and then categorizing them based on their test scores. These are the two most important conditions for students to make the most of their EMP courses.

2.2. Designing the curriculum

According to Melodie Hull, the curriculum of EMP courses should be designed contextually and experientially in order to “provide hands-on opportunities to apply or use the language immediately”. Also, they should be based on the medical field and follow an A-B format. Particularly, lesson A will concentrate on terminology and acquisition. Then, lesson B will provide opportunities for students to use learning from lesson A into real context through different interactive activities. These consist of “using actual hospital charts and forms, role-playing assessment, use of medical equipment, open exploration of treatments and interventions related to the main subject”.

2.3. Focusing on spoken English

Encouraging students to interact with others through exercises and discussions based on the lessons can accelerate their speaking skill and understanding of spoken English. Besides, P. Jurov’s study supports the point that creating and presenting their ideas in front of the class also help students be more confident and improve their spoken English.

2.4. Apply new technologies in teaching

Mastering English is a long process and requires a great effort from learners. Apart from the classes they attend at school, students should be motivated to self-study as well. These days, lecturers can take advantage of the internet and other advanced technologies like Artificial Technology to not only increase the effectiveness of their lessons at school but also encourage their students to study at home. These ranges from interactive programs like Complete Anatomy on the iOS, where students can learn almost everything related to Gross Anatomy in English using a 3-D model of the human body, to self-designed quizzes using websites like Quizlet and Kahoot. The opportunities to create new and engage home-learning experience is endless, and should be utilized to further increase students' interest and motivation.

3. CONCLUSION

Teaching the English language is always a challenge, and it is even harder when it comes to medical English. In this article, the author presents some prominent methods of teaching English that have been proven by many other studies. Especially, for Vietnamese students, it is imperative to focus on improving students' English speaking skill. A well-designed class with an appropriate curriculum, and the use of new technologies for teaching can also further enhance student's learning experience, leading to better and better outcomes.

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