

AN EVALUATION OF THE
CURRENT COURSE IN ENGLISH FOR MEDICAL
STUDENTS at AIN SHAMS UNIVERSITY with
SPECIAL ATTENTION to READING SKILLS

1.54
A THESIS

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ABSTRACT

This research set out to investigate the situation of the students at the Faculty of Medicine, Ain Shams University, with regard to the current English course. Interest in this area was aroused in the researcher after observing how much time her own son, who was a student of medicine, spent reading. When the researcher looked at the English book which he was studying the idea occurred to her to investigate the situation to try to find out why her son, and all his colleagues, spent so much time reading. To do so it was first necessary to investigate the conditions which could be the reason behind the problem. The researcher therefore conducted a Pilot Study in which she interviewed 12 professors, 2 administration officials, the Dean, 40 undergraduate students, and 25 post-graduate students. The results of the Pilot Study revealed that, firstly, the students are faced with many difficulties at the beginning of medical education. Secondly, it revealed what the professors expected the students to use the English language for. Thirdly, it revealed, when, where, and how the course was taught. It was then that the researcher decided to make this research.

The researcher then made a survey of the conditions surrounding the situation: what may have led to the problem, the problem itself, the review of the relevant literature,

and a questionnaire as an instrument to find out how far the students who have covered the book benefited from it.

Based on the above information the researcher established the students' needs. From those needs along with theoretical data obtained from the literature, she set criteria for evaluating the course. Then evaluated the existing course After that she set a framework for a course based on study skills which may be more beneficial to the students.

As this research focuses on the reading skills, the researcher identified the reading skills needed by the students at the Faculty of Medicine, Ain Shams University. She then proposed a unit on the reading component in the suggested framework for the course. The objective of the unit is to train the students in the reading skill which is considered one of the most imminent needs which would enable the students to pursue their studies with more facility.

In conclusion, this research has revealed that the students at the Faculty of Medicine, Ain Shams University, need an alternate approach to the teaching of the English language course . A study skills approach may prove to be a better one to be followed because it may enable the students to use the English language independently in the pursuit of their medical studies. It has also shown that the current

English course is not based on study skills and that it only helps the students to acquire some vocabulary items.

It is to be noted that the unit which has been developed has used only some of the identified reading skills for the students to suit the allotted time for the course. However this unit is just an example of how texts could be exploited whenever a study skills approach is used.

The researcher recommends that this unit should be tested on the students to determine its effectiveness and hopes that this could be the subject of future research. It is also recommended that similar research be conducted on the other three skills of listening to lectures, seminar strategies and writing so that eventually the students at the Faculty of Medicine, Ain Shams University, or any other medical students, can really benefit from the English course and can overcome the difficulties which they face due to lack of appropriate training in study skills.

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CHAPTER I

THE PROBLEM

Introduction:

On the threshold of Medical Education in Egypt in general and at Ain Shams University, Faculty of Medicine in particular, undergraduate students come face to face with a stunning reality that whatever English they may have learnt to date is deficient; it does not cope with the requirement to study exclusively in English.

Apparently, the need to overcome such deficiency is felt by the university decision makers. That is why a course in English is administered to the said students during the first and second years of their Medical Education. The title of the current book used for the course in English is Medical English. There is no other indication on or inside the book as to who or where or when the book was compiled or published. The only such reference found is "by English Department".

The main object of the book, to quote the Foreword, is:

"..to furnish the student with a certain stock of ideas about the English language used in medicine as well as wide medical facts. It will enrich his vocabulary, idioms expressions and dialogues. The only way to obtain such requisites is by reading

which allows him to attack any subject in an orderly fashion, and treat medical subjects with facility of expression .." [sic] (Foreword) (1)

These objectives stated in the Foreword, however general they may be, admit the need for a special kind of instruction to enable the students to cope with their medical subjects. It considers the register of the language of medicine, as well as the ability to read as the general objectives of the course. Such general objectives may imply that a particular approach to the teaching of the English course is necessary, as the students need English for a specific purpose. Thus an ESP approach can be adopted, as an ESP approach in language learning is geared to the students' learning how to use the English language more effectively. (Yorkey, 1970).

In a survey of approaches toward ESP, Kennedy and Bolitho (1984) say:

".. Program objectives in an institution where English is the medium of instruction may well necessitate a study skills approach to English since the students need the language to study other subjects on the curriculum.." (p. 12)

Widdowson (1983) in his book Teaching Language As Communication says that knowing a language means both knowing what signification sentences have as instances of usage and what value they take as instances of use. The

(1) No place or date of publication found.

evidence seems to be that learners who have acquired a good deal of knowledge of the usage of a particular language find themselves at a loss when they are confronted with actual instances of use. If we translate this to suit the approach required for the students at the Faculty of Medicine we will realize that they too need to be equipped with the necessary skills for coping with their studies as the medium of study is in English. Therefore, a communicative approach, which subsumes study skills in English, may be a more beneficial one for the students as they need more than anything else to learn how to use the language more effectively in the pursuit of their subject matter studies.

It is the purpose of this research to evaluate the existing English course at the Faculty of Medicine, Ain Shams University - forthwith referred to as FMASU - from the point of view of the students' needs. This will involve:

- a. identifying students' needs
 - b. deriving objectives from these needs
 - c. evaluating the existing course against "a" and "b" above, and
 - d. develop criteria for..
 - e. revising the course and setting a new course framework.
- This new framework may involve a reorganization of and supplementation to existing materials in the present course. It is not intended to start at the beginning and write a new course.

BACKGROUND OF THE PROBLEM:

In her MA Thesis, Fahmy (1978) surveys the reasons for the deterioration in the standard of the English language in Egypt:

".. After the Revolution of 1952 and the Tripartite Aggression of 1956 .. National re-emergence accompanied by a desire for cultural and linguistic autonomy and identity led to the neglect of the English language and its rapid deterioration during the years 1956-1970.." (p.68)

Fahmy claims that another reason for this deterioration is the wide expansion in all fields of education which resulted in an increase in the number of classes. With the decision to make education free for everyone, like "air and water" (Taha Hussein), the capacity of the classes increased, thus overburdening the diminishing number of over-worked, underpaid efficient teachers who had replaced the native-speaker teachers who were deported after 1956.(p.44) The open-door policy from 1971 onwards, may have restored some of the long lost prestige to the English language but, according to Abul Azayem, the then Dean of the English Language Inspectorate, " ..it worsened the already existing teacher problem as demand was high for people with linguistic abilities. This situation lured many language teachers to the business world by its lucrative salaries.." (p. 68)

While Fahmy surveys the reasons for the deterioration in the standard of English, Zaher (1981) in her PhD Thesis describes the English Language situation in Egyptian preparatory and secondary schools. She says that students start learning English at the preparatory stage for three years followed by three more years in the secondary stage. During the six years emphasis is placed on the aural-oral approach or the audio-lingual method. Such a method is not without its disadvantages. Students who are instructed according to this method may repeat automatically like parrots without understanding what they are doing and without being able to use the language in situations different from those they have learned. She calls this:

".. a passive not an active form of learning which does not begin to engage the students' full mental powers.." (p. 4)

As is very well known, this situation is very true. A large number of these secondary school graduates, especially from the scientific section pass on to universities where the medium of instruction is in English as is the case in the faculties of medicine. As a result of this type of learning which is described by Zaher, such students are not trained in any skills which would enable them to continue their undergraduate studies in English without difficulty. Although the audio-lingual method aims at developing the listening and speaking skills, yet whatever is learnt during

those six years of learning English as a foreign language does not in any way train the students in the authentic skills of reading, writing, listening and speaking.

The Role of the English Language at FMASU:

At FMASU, officially, English is the medium of instruction for lectures, textbooks, references, and examinations. During the first year only, students attend the following:

Table 1
(Time-table for first year students 1987/1988)

<u>No. of Hours</u>	<u>Name of Course</u>
120	Anatomy and Embryology
45	Biology
25	Physics
75	Chemistry and Biochemistry
120	Physiology
60	Histology
30	Behavioral Sciences
30	Public Health and Statistics
30	English
535	Total

This time-table reveals that the number of hours of instruction, in English, to which the students are exposed, shows a drastic shift from Secondary School Education.

From Secondary School records, the students of the third year secondary, Science Section, come into contact with English for only 63 hours during the whole school year. (5

lessons/week of 45 minutes each multiplied by 26 weeks as the maximum time the students actually spend at school.) It is these same students who eventually will pass on to such faculties as the Faculty of Medicine. A simple division of the number of hours of instruction in English will show that the amount of English students come into contact with at FMASU first year only in all subjects, is 8.5 times as much as what they were exposed to during the last year of secondary school. Furthermore, the nature of their contact with English is also different at the university level. Where contact at school was basically and on the most part teacher-centered, based on prototype classroom procedures, at university, the student is no longer in a basically teacher-centered situation. He attends lectures where professors lay guidelines for the students to follow, in other words professors open the door for the students, but, the student must depend on himself in the pursuit of knowledge from the lectures, the sections, and from authentic English texts.

To go back to Table 1, an interpretation will show that out of the 535 hours of subject study in English, only 5.6% of the total number of hours is given to the study of the English language. Supposedly, this English course is to help the students through the remaining 94% of their subject studies, which are exclusively in English.