CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

This present research is an attempt to investigate and identify the English language needs of the students of the Faculty of Medical Sciences, General Nursing Department, Hodeidah University, Yemen. It will try to highlight the needs of students for English at the Faculty in their studies and in their future career (graduates as Nursing Doctors on the filed). On the practical side, the findings of this study will establish a needs profile which could be used to review, evaluate and adjust the current English programme used in the General Nursing Department.

Part of its aim is to evaluate the method of teaching, medium of instruction and the evaluation system as well. It will try to find out and identify the problems that ESP teachers have been encountering in relation to teaching ESP courses in the Faculty of Medical Sciences, General Nursing Department.

Finally, based on the findings, it will try to provide some suggestions towards the improvement of the teaching situation of English for specific purposes (ESP) courses at the (FMS).

It was found that English plays a very vital and essential role in medical studies because the medical students have to read medical textbooks, handouts and professional journals which are mostly written in English. Therefore, medical students need to use English for studying their subject matter and also for their higher careers in the future.
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Most medical students at Hodeidah University, Yemen, still have difficulties in using English for academic purposes although they studied English for six consecutive years in schools. This means that more English courses should be offered to these medical students. Furthermore, the content of the English courses should be more specific and relevant to their academic needs.

Although there has been some studies conducted on needs analysis in Yemen of which only one study on needs of medical students by (Bin-Tyeh, 1996), there has been no formal survey of the needs of medical students in using English for academic purposes at Hodeidah University. English has so far been taught without systematic survey of the needs of the medical students. In order to understand as much about the learners as possible, an investigation of the formal needs analysis of the medical students in their use of academic English is essential. These needs will then serve as a guide to improve or expand the existing English programme so that more effective English courses will be created for the medical students in the future.

The importance of analyzing students’ language needs prior an English for specific purposes (ESP) course has been a paradigm of ESP course design practice since the 1970s. A failure to begin an ESP course design process by carrying out a systematic needs analysis is claimed to result in a course that is not relevant to the students’ learning needs and hence hinders the teaching/learning process (Munby, 1978; Mackay and Mountford, 1978; Hutchinson and Waters, 1987; Zoghoul, 1985).

Students’ needs will be investigated in functional and notional terms, through fours sources: students, subject teachers, graduates and ESP teachers. Subject and ESP teachers have been included in the current study because they are subjects who are involved in the teaching/learning process in the Faculty. The graduates have been
included in this study because they are the nursing doctors on field and they are expected to be more aware than the students of the language needs in the Faculty (from which they graduated) and also of their professional commitments. de Escordia (1984, as cited in Bin-Tyeh, 1996 p.2) points out that “A real need is only felt, in most cases, towards the end of the careers, when most specialized... material has to be handled.”

The following review will throw some light on the existing situation in the Faculty of Medical Sciences, General Nursing Department and will illustrate some of the reasons that led the researcher to undertake this study.

1.1 Background of the Problem

1.1.1 Faculty of Medical Sciences-GND

The Faculty of Medical Sciences comprises two departments or specializations-medical laborites and general nursing.

In the department of General Nursing the academic studies extend for 4 years. After the 4 years study the students have to spend a few months on the internship stage before they finally graduate as nursing doctors.

The medical syllabus, in general, is allocated to the four medical sections- premedical, basic, applied and clinical. Each section represents one level of study e.g. premedical section, the first year, basic, the 2nd year; applied, the 3rd year and clinical, the 4th year. In the first year of study, the students are introduced to the basics sciences -biology, physics and chemistry. These subjects are made up of theoretical and practical classes. The teaching and the materials (textbooks, handouts, reference books) used are in English. Therefore the students have for the first time (in contrast
to the teaching situation in secondary school) to follow lectures in English, read their specialized materials in English and write notes and laboratory experiments in English. At the end of each term they have to sit for their examinations which are in English. This intensive use of English in their academic studies causes a lot of problems to the students (especially if they are weak in English).

English language is also one of the subjects taught in the first year (the premedical nursing stage). The aim of teaching English in the Faculty of medical Sciences as explained by the Faculty administration and teaching staff is to help the students cope with the materials of their different disciplines.

There are some other medical subjects other than those taught in the first year. Subjects like anatomy, physiology, histology, embryology etc. are introduced to the students in the basic stage (level 2). In this stage certain medical topics are treated comprehensively and exhaustively in each of the above mentioned subjects. At the end of 2nd year, final examinations are held in English. These examinations cover both oral and written questions. It is very necessary to know here that the students must pass these examinations to enable them to continue their medical studies.

At the applied stage (representing level 3), which is also called the transitional stage, (from theory to practical) the students are prepared for the practical teaching. Besides the theoretical classes in pathology, pharmacology, parasitology, etc. at the Faculty, the students have for the first time to visit different wards in the hospital twice a week. Here they learn how to take the history of the patient.

The last stage is the clinical stage represented by level 4. This stage as in the applied stage focuses on theoretical and practical teaching. In the theoretical classes,
the students have to follow lectures, discussions and seminars on some medical topics e.g. surgery, medicine etc. Visits are then made to the different wards where students spend some weeks in each ward attending practical classes on the topics mentioned above. During this period the students are expected to be trained as how to take the history of the patients in English, present and discuss medical cases in front of their colleagues and lecturers in English, write report on a certain medical case, etc. At the end of the clinical stage, oral and written examinations are held in English and the students are expected to submit a graduation research paper on topics concerned with Nursing. This research paper is written also in English.

This indicates that the medical students (nursing department) are faced with a lot of academic functions which they have to carry out in English. These students need to function and communicate effectively in their field of study. That is, the students of the Faculty of Medical Sciences, General Nursing Department, seem to lack communicative ability in language skills especially in writing and speaking. To do this they need to acquire certain strategies, study skills in English which are relevant to their own discipline. Therefore, it can be said that the students need English for their academic purpose (EAP which is a branch of ESP) which would emphasize the development of subjects-related study skills. These study skills could be identified by carrying out an ‘academic’ needs analysis. This kind of needs analysis should take into account the involvement of the concerned students in deciding what type of English course they would like to learn and how to learn (Hutchinson and Waters, 1987).
1.1.2 The ESP English Programme

An overwhelming majority of medical advances, research papers and studies are published in English. The great dependence on English in order to have access to medical discipline is also shared in the Yemen especially in the educational institutions. The Faculty of Medical Sciences, Hodeidah University, is one of these institutions where students need English to gain access to the specialized material of their discipline. This led to the design of English programme for Specific Purposes.

English at the Faculty of Medical Sciences is taught only in the premedical stage, i.e. the first year (in both semesters) and is timetabled to 3 hours a week. That is, only 36 hours are given to the teaching of ESP course in each semester in the premedical stage. No other English programme is taught in the other levels of study.

The current English language programme being used at the Faculty of Medical Sciences is made up of a collection of separate lectures. No textbook is prescribed to the students of Medical Sciences. This material which forms the ESP courses for the 1st and 2nd semesters is mainly based on developing medical terminologies and some reading skills with comprehension exercises (see appendix VIII).

A brief review of the current ESP courses taught in the Faculty will be given later in this chapter.

1.1.3 The Students

A big number of the students joining the Faculty of Medical Sciences are secondary school leavers who had studied English for six consecutive years. These students, most of them, come from public or government schools either in town or
rural areas. A very small minority come from private schools. In general their standard of English is weak especially those who come from rural areas—lack of textbooks, competent teachers and method of teaching—a situation shared in most Third World countries. The method of teaching which seems to be based on grammar-translation or structural method does not equip the students to use the language effectively so as to carry their studies. As a result, the students resort to memorizing or rote learning, a situation which English teachers have experienced in their teaching especially in contexts where English is a foreign language. Therefore, when these students join the Faculty they have considerable problems during the 1st year particularly in the first semester where for the first time they are exposed to an intensive use of English in the teaching and learning process.

As it has been demonstrated in the last few pages (1.1.1), the students in the General Nursing Department are supposed to tackle specialized material and also carry out a number of communicative activities in their field of study. Because of their low standard in English it can be observed there is a big gap between what is expected from them by the demands of the academic studies and their level of study on entering the Faculty. This prevailing situation has encouraged the researcher to conduct this study that is based on needs analysis which is considered as a main procedure towards designing ESP that would help the students in their academic studies.

1.1.4 The Teaching Staff

Most of the subject teachers or lecturers at the Faculty carry high academic degrees. They have received their higher education in Western Universities, Arab Universities or Eastern-Europe Universities. There are few demonstrators in the
Faculty who received their B.A. degrees from the same Faculty in which they have studied. Although these lecturers are expected to lecture in English, which is claimed to be the medium of instruction in the Faculty, they lecture with the help of Arabic (Learners L1).

1.1.5 The ESP Teachers

According to the Faculty administration, it is the responsibility of the Department of English, Faculty of Education, to teach these two ESP courses in the two departments in the Faculty of Medical Sciences. The teachers are deputed by the Faculty of Education to teach the ESP courses for the students of Medical Sciences. Almost all teachers who teach these courses are either BA (studying for an MA degree) or MA degree holders. In few cases the teachers are partimers. Some of them graduated from the Faculty of Education, and they had some pre-service training in teaching English. They may also have worked for a few years as teachers in schools before they were appointed to teach in the Faculty of Education. Those who had graduated from the Faculty of Arts had not received any Pre-service training in ELT (English language Teaching). Other than that, teachers have not received any ‘in-service’ training at the time of their work.

At present there are only three teachers at the Faculty of Education who are responsible for teaching ESP courses at the Faculty of Medical Sciences. ESP teachers face a lot of problems in their teaching, namely, adjusting the syllabus to the level of the students because of their level and the problem of large classes. By the way, no ESP teacher is regular at the Faculty of Medical Sciences. That is, the ESP teacher is changed every year in the Faculty of Medical Sciences.
1.2 The Status of English in Yemen

English as a foreign language is an obligatory subject in the curriculum of the Yemeni schools and universities. In fact, it is the only foreign language that is taught in the Yemeni schools. However, there have been some serious efforts to introduce French into the curriculum of the Yemeni schools. The results of such an endeavor were not so fruitful and now the teaching of French is confined to few schools in the biggest two cities in Yemen, namely, Sana’a, the capital city, and Taiz, the second largest city in the country. Hillenbrand (as cited in Modesh, 2005, pp.4-5) gives a brief account of EFL situation in Yemen saying:

Arabic is the language of government, the media, religious observance, and education in Yemen. However, English is the medium of teaching in the Faculties of Medicine, Science, and Agriculture at the University of Sana’a. The principal foreign language taught in schools and universities is English.

Given the importance of English worldwide, Yemen chose not to be scientifically and educationally marginalized and therefore made it possible for its people to have full access to this language and enabled them to have maximum benefit from the various fields of knowledge that are written in English. Before 1962, Yemen was totally isolated from the rest of the world because the monarch of Yemen (Imam) wanted the situation to remain unchanged so that he could easily control the people. But luckily after the revolution in 1962, a new life came into existence in Yemen and schools and universities were established so that Yemen can catch up with the rest of the world. As a result, people started to talk about slogans such as ‘education for all’ and so on.
In recent years English has become an important language in the Republic of Yemen due to some political and economic changes that took place in the country after the unification of the two parts of Yemen, the North and South, in 1990. Parents are now aware of the fact that English is very essential for their children's success and prosperity in life. Therefore, parents feel very proud of their sons and daughters when they hear them speak English. They also, especially the affluent ones, send their children to English-medium schools so that they can be very fluent and competent in English. This positive attitude towards English gave some businessmen the incentive to establish language institutes in the main cities of Yemen. Now parents encourage their sons and daughters to join these institutes in summer vacations and also throughout the year to learn this prestigious language. This sort of awareness about the importance of English is actually based on the fact that if one is literate in English, he or she is very likely to have good job opportunities and consequently a better future. Besides, there is a lot of demand in the market for those who know English. They, for instance, can work as teachers, translators, secretaries; they can also get paid for writing articles in English newspapers. It is also worth mentioning to say that in order to facilitate English language learning in Yemen, two English newspapers (Yemen Times and Yemen Observer) saw the light of the day and now learners of English are sometimes given some short English lessons in those papers.

1.3 ELT Situation in Yemen

With the collapse of the ruthless monarchy system in Yemen in 1962, the country witnessed a number of very important changes. One of these changes is the establishment of the formal education system and the inclusion of the English language as a subject in the school curriculum. According to Al-Mekhlafi 1999 (as
cited in Modhesh, 2005, pp.5-6), the need for introducing the English language into the Yemeni schools and universities was crucial; consequently, a group of Egyptian teachers were hired to teach English in Yemen. As there was no specific curriculum for teaching English to Yemeni learners, these teachers used the then used curriculum in Egypt, that is, The Nile Course of English. This curriculum continued to be used in the Yemeni schools until late 1960s. By 1970, this course was replaced by another one, The Progressive Living English for the Arab World. Before introducing this course to the Yemeni learners of English, it was in use in the neighboring Gulf countries. But since these courses were not specifically designed to meet the needs of the Yemeni learners of English, they soon got replaced by English for Yemen (EFY) in 1975, a series designed by the Ministry of Education in Yemen in collaboration with the British Council. According to Al-Mekhalfi (1999, as in Modhesh, 2005, p.6), the goals of EFY courses in the secondary stage are:

a. To give further practice in the language acquired at the preparatory stage.

b. To consolidate the language acquired at the preparatory stage.

c. To extend the students’ knowledge of the basic language acquired at the preparatory stages.

d. To introduce the students to practice in scientific language, vocabulary, sentences which are read in scientific descriptions.

e. To give the students some knowledge of the descriptions of language.

f. To give the students study skills, e.g., extraction of information from texts such as reading, summarizing, categorizing, defining, etc.
Though the EFY series was far better than the previously used series, it was nevertheless criticized for its heavy focus on grammar and reading at the expense of the other language skills, namely, Listening, Speaking and Writing. As a consequence, in the school year 1995, the EFY series was replaced by The Crescent English for Yemen. This series was designed within the framework of the communicative approach to language teaching/learning, and is still in use in the preparatory and secondary schools in Yemen.

In general, the objective of teaching English as a foreign language in Yemen has been to develop the Yemeni learners' productive and receptive skills in the target language. English is therefore introduced to the seventh graders of the preparatory school, especially when they are 13 years of age.

Obviously the decision taken to change the EFY curriculum and teaching materials in Yemen did not occur in a vacuum, but were rather in accordance with the paradigm shift that language pedagogy witnessed in the twentieth century. This paradigm shift from grammar-translation approaches to direct methods and eventually to communicative-function oriented approaches to direct language pedagogy helped create a new understanding about what it is that language teachers, textbook writers and syllabus designers should focus on when planning or conducting an ESL/EFL programme.

1.4 Reviewing Medical English Courses Taught at Hodeidah University

English courses 101 and 102 that are taught for the students of the Faculty of Medical Sciences, Hodeidah University, Yemen, are a collection of lessons and parts of lessons taken from different sources. English 101 is supposed to be taught over the
first semester of level one and English 102 is supposed to be taught over the second semester. Level one at the Faculty of Medical Sciences has English class of three hours a week. Each course is composed of a number of units. English 101 consists of 4 units and English 102 contains 5 units. No unit headings are specified in both courses, nor are these units interrelated. Furthermore, no acknowledgement is given to the units in the two courses. In fact, these two courses were prepared by the ESP teachers teaching in the Faculty who kept them as regular courses at the Faculty.

Each unit in English 101 begins with a reading passage followed by few comprehension questions and a number of grammar exercises. All the grammar exercises seem to test students’ knowledge of grammar points that they had studied in school. Most of these grammar exercises are based on gap filling and multiple choice items. It can be pointed out here that including so many exercises based on grammar makes students feel bored because students find themselves doing only grammar in so many classes and the practice of grammar is based on isolated sentences. In addition, these exercises are done to the exclusion of other activities. Not only that, but also there is no connection between grammar points introduced in exercises and what has been previously presented in the unit. In this case, all grammar exercises are presented in isolation, i.e. there is no connection or link between the content of units and grammatical structures in exercises.

With regard to the presentation of new vocabulary, it was found that each unit contains some new lexicon (terms, general and specialized words). On the other hand, if the students’ level is taken into consideration at the present situation, one can say that most of these vocabulary items seem to be new and unfamiliar to them. All words are introduced within the content of the units. In some cases, some of them are
presented in the form of ‘glossary’ and in some cases they are presented through antonyms and synonyms.

English 102 is different from English 101 in that all the units in English 102 are devoted to specialized medical terminologies, medical specialists, old diseases names and their modern definitions. There are also some cases or situations in which specialized vocabulary items are introduced in relation to other parts of speech, that is, how some words change their forms and functions to form other word class.

As far as the other language skills are concerned, the two courses do not contain any listening, speaking and writing activities. These skills are completely neglected. However, if any of these books provide listening activities, for example, it would be impossible to give listening practice with a huge number of students. As for the productive skills (writing and speaking), no activities are given to develop these two skills.

Regarding the language skills, it was stated in the second paragraph of this section that all units in English 101 are based on reading passages, so it can be said that the material of this course gives some emphasis on the reading skill as an attempt to develop reading strategies. But as it is, the material will hardly succeed in achieving this aim by the type of comprehension questions provided. That is, because these question types are not built on skill building or reading strategies development.

Nothing can be said about the features of these two courses as such. Methodology of English 101 and 102 cannot be detected or specified. This is because most of the content of these two courses are taken from different sources. Thus, it is not appropriate to analyze them in terms of their methodology in detail.
None of the two courses is accompanied by or includes any supporting materials such as a teacher's guide, cassettes, or visual materials to facilitate teachers' instructions or guidance for students to do pair work, class work or any other activities.

To conclude this rapid review of English 101 and 102 of the Faculty of Medical Sciences, Hodeidah University, one can candidly say that such courses are, to a great extent, not conducive to learning. For a teacher, it would not be an easy job to teach such courses. It would be difficult to deal with such inconsistency in every aspect of the course. For a learner, such a course is very boring and disappointing. The analysis of students' questionnaire revealed that the students who studied these two courses expressed their dissatisfaction and lack of interest.

1.5 Research Problem

As discussed earlier in (1.1.1), the students at the Faculty of Medical Sciences are faced with a lot of academic functions which they have to carry out in English. It seems that the ESP programme currently taught does not provide them with these academic functions. This means that English is a necessary tool for these students in their medical nursing studies. Therefore, in order to function effectively in their studies, the students need to acquire certain strategies in English which are relevant to their purposes of studies. This indicates that these students need an English programme that would provide them with these strategies or study skills which would help them cope with their specialized literature. To be able to design such a course many ESP practitioners have asserted that it should be preceded by a needs analysis. They claim that a course that has been designed without taking into consideration the students' needs is likely to result in a course that is not relevant to the students'
learning needs and would hence hinder the teaching/learning process. Also as it has been mentioned in 1.1.2, the current English programme used at the Faculty of Medical Sciences lacks the analysis of the students’ language needs. Therefore, it is the aim of this study to carry out an investigation of the students’ language needs as a first step towards designing a course that is needs-based.

1.6 Aims of the Study

In undertaking this study, the aim of the researcher is to investigate and identify the language needs of the students of FMS, General Nursing Department, at Hodeidah University. It is expected that the identification of these needs would help in recasting what is currently there to yield appropriate courses that are responsive to the learners’ needs as well as to the needs of the workplace. More specifically, needs analysis in the present study seeks the following ends.

1. To investigate the felt and perceived language needs of the students as well as the felt perceived needs of the graduates.

2. To find out the problems faced by the students as well as by ESP teachers and suggest measures to improve the situation.

3. To evaluate the current teaching materials and suggest necessary changes.

4. To suggest necessary changes in the aims and objectives of the present syllabus.

5. To investigate and find out the current method of teaching, the medium of instruction, and the evaluation system.
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1.7 Research Questions

The actual needs of the students of the Faculty of Medical Sciences, General Nursing Department, will be investigated from the viewpoint of

(a) Students

(b) Graduates

(c) Subject Teachers

(d) ESP Teachers

Based on the findings, the researcher tries to answer the following questions:

1- What are the language needs of the students in the General Nursing Department as perceived by the students of the four levels in general and at the different levels of study in particular?

2- What are the language needs of the students as perceived by the teachers?

3- Are there any preferences of needs at the different levels of study?

4- What are the language needs of the graduates as perceived them?

5- What are the students’ problems/difficulties that face them in using English in their academic study?

6- What are the problems faced by the ESP teachers that prevent them from heading towards the desired ends?

7- To what extent is the current ESP programme suitable in the present context?
8- What recommendations shall be made towards improving it?

9- What are the necessary changes to be incorporated in the objectives/syllabus in the ESP programme for the Faculty of Medical Sciences?

10- Do the teaching method useds; the medium of instruction and the evaluation system correspond with the requirements of students' academic study?

1.8 Scope and Limitations of the Study

This study is limited to the students of the Faculty of Medical Sciences, General Nursing Department, Hodeidah University, Yemen. It covers needs analysis and matters related to the specific ESP syllabus for medical students. The study was conducted in the academic year (2007-2008).