

# **ASPECTS OF TEACHING ENGLISH MEDICAL TERMINOLOGY TO ENGLISH MEDIUM STUDENTS**

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Kharkiv National Medical University has been known as a university providing English medium instruction since 1996. It enrolls both the students from the countries where the English language has an official status (in the majority of cases it is the second language) and from those where it is a foreign language, those who did their school in the medium of English as well as those who did it in the medium of other than English. According to the regulations existing at the University, the students who wish to enter KNMU are to have at least B1 CEF level of English. The University encourages them to produce a certificate of an internationally recognized English language examination but this is not obligatory; those who do not have it have to meet for an interview with the teachers from Foreign Languages Department to have their level of the English language proficiency assessed. All these make KNMU popular with the students who completed a course of school training in their mother tongue. Understanding that these students may lack the knowledge of basic (usually learnt at school) biological, chemical, physical terminology necessary to acquire the knowledge of pre-clinical subjects, KNMU launched a 90-hour course of English for the English medium students. Within the course the students work with basic elements of medical words, get the skills of building and analyzing medical words, understand the meaning of new medical words by defining their elements, master pronunciation and spelling of medical terms, identify abbreviations used in medical literature. Besides, the students from non-English speaking countries can master English terminology of related sciences such as Physics, Biology, Chemistry, supposed to be known from school. The questions of organizing and teaching this course (such as course design, teaching methodology and students' knowledge assessment) have already been reported in detail [1]. To make it attractive and useful

for both the students from the second and expanding circle countries the lessons have been organized as those in English Medical Terminology with the elements of content based instruction [2].

As a part of needs analysis performed to make adjustments in the course we asked the students their opinion about the subject. This article deals with the study of attitude of international students to the subject *English Medical Terminology* as well as the analysis of key factors determining importance of this discipline for them.

The investigation was carried out as a part of research project *Linguistic Difficulties of English Medium Students* performed by Foreign Languages Department of Kharkiv National Medical University in May 2015. The survey enrolled 223 first-year English medium students majoring in Medicine and Dentistry from thirty countries. The majority was made up by those from India (45.3%), Israel (8.1%), Lebanon (7.6%), and Nigeria (6.7%). The students from Egypt, Ghana, Palestine, Namibia, Iraq, Brazil and other countries took part in the survey as well.

The questionnaire consisted of several blocks of questions, one of which concerned estimation of the subject by students which they studied at Foreign Languages Department and contained 5 multiple choice questions and 3 open-end questions, namely:

- How do you find our classes?
- Is the workload for the subject heavier than expected?
- How did our subject help you?
- What will you need the knowledge obtained at our classes for?
- Should our classes be taught to the English medium students?
- What are the best aspects of our subject?
- What are the worst aspects of our subject?
- How could our subject be improved?

The analysis of findings of the survey showed that the great majority of students thought that this subject should be taught to English medium students. The negative answer was given by 6 of all respondents, i.e. 4 students from India, 1 student from Pakistan and 1 student from Egypt.

Estimating the subject, 35.8% of respondents pointed out that it was interesting, 34.5% found it useful, 30.9% regarded it as a necessary one for their future career, and 22.8% thought it helped them to orient in medical language. By countries, seventy-two per cent of students from Egypt and 71% of those ones from Ghana, 47% students from Israel, 41% from India, 37.5% from Nigeria, 23% from Lebanon considered these classes to be useful. In contrast, 3.5% of respondents noted that the classes were useless. Such opinion was provided by students from Israel (17%), Lebanon (17%) and India (2%). Poor figures of understanding the course value may suggest insufficient motivation work done by the teachers. Five students (2 from India, 2 from Turkey and 1 from Egypt) pointed out that they were not taught anything new at classes. Most probably these students have medical background, which resulted in such assessment. Eighty-three students thought that the classes helped them to adapt to medical language; they helped 143 students to understand medical terms and 27 students to understand different phenomena in English, which they knew in the first language before studying the subject. It even helped 8 students to improve English. It is interesting to note that 3 of them were students from India, though it is believed by many that students from India speak English well.

Considering the way how the knowledge obtained at classes would be used, 108 (48.4%) students pointed out that they would help to understand clinical subjects better; 58 students (26%) thought they would help to understand scientific articles and books in medicine; 70 students (31.4%) noted that owing to the subject they would understand medical records in future, and for 70 students (31.4%) it would be easier to understand different phenomena in medicine. Understanding medical terminology was important for 64 students, namely 66.7% students from India, 75.4% students from Nigeria, 45.5% students from Egypt. It is natural that students from the countries, where English is not a foreign first language, e.g. India and Nigeria, are more oriented to work in English medium and, thus, they understand how important it is for their future career, than those who came from the countries where English is a foreign language.

Estimating the workload, 110 students noted that that the subject was easy because they knew English. This was pointed out by 64 students (28.7%) from India, 15 students (6.7%) from Nigeria, 10 students (4.5%) from Lebanon. Far less respondents noted that the subject was not difficult because they had classes in English Medical Terminology and Latin simultaneously. This can be explained by the fact that English and Latin spelling and, moreover, pronunciation differ, thus the parallels are traced with difficulty by the students; and Latin does not lend a helping hand in this case. The course was not easy for 19 students. For 2 students from Israel and 1 student from India the subject was difficult because they did not know English well enough.

The students were also asked open-end questions concerning best and worst aspects of the course *English Medical Terminology*. They had the opportunity to express their point of view, to suggest their ideas how to improve this course, what should be done to make it more available, easier for understanding, and efficient for all students, taking their interests, age, sex and home country into account. According to the answers provided by students from India, the discipline helped them to learn and to understand medical terms which they did not know before, to enrich their not only medical, but also everyday vocabulary, to ease understanding of other subjects. The students also noted that they used medical dictionaries less frequently because the structure and the term elements made the meaning of the words clear. Considering positive aspects, the respondents also specified that the vocabulary used in the course was new and up-to-date. However, the participants also mentioned some difficulties and negative aspects they faced in the process of studying. There were difficulties caused by difference in pronunciation of medical terms in Latin and English. It was suggested by the students from India to enlarge the scope of units and add more information as well as to supplement written test by oral ones. This view was also supported by the students from Nigeria.

The students from Israel specified that a good aspect of the subject in question for them was presence of the material closely associated with human anatomy. This interaction made the process of learning of both subjects easier. It was also noticed by

students that much more attention should be paid to this subject and it may be taught during the second year as well.

It was written by the students from Lebanon that in order to make the classes more productive and efficient, more audiovisual teaching aids should be used; they also proposed to arrange the events, which can contribute to communication between international and Ukrainian students.

Working off of missed classes on Saturday and the necessity to write tests frequently were specified as the worst aspects of the subject in question. The students also mentioned that the teachers should use an individual approach to every student in order to achieve good results as there are different categories of students and it should be taken into account.

Medical terminology is a specific terminology used to achieve the purpose of communication in the health care field efficiently and precisely [3]. “Medical vocabulary may present a hurdle even to those who are very good in English, and also to those who cannot understand the borrowings from Greek and Latin languages” [4; 79]. Medical terminology has a number of specific features, which differs it from other term systems. The majority of medical words are made of combining forms of Greek and Latin origin. This feature of word building can be used to help students deal with these words. “Medical vocabulary is an open system with a large number of low-frequency words and newly created words. Teaching and learning all the words seem to be an impossible task. Hence, teaching learners vocabulary learning strategies for inferring the word meanings is more efficient than teaching every vocabulary item encountered” [5; 145]. Besides, the abbreviations used in medical field are quite difficult and “the connections cannot be traced from the English” [4; 88-89].

*English Medical Terminology* is a subject taught by many medical schools abroad both in English-speaking and non-English speaking countries. According to Y.H. Hui, in the USA “millions of students are enrolled in medical terminology courses”; course books have been published since the late 1950s and the number of college textbooks has risen to hundreds [6; vii]. There is experience of teaching medical

terminology in Australia [7]. P. Jurov reports his 4-year experience of teaching English medical terminology in China and concludes that “this is a very serious matter and should form an integral part of the university curricula” [7; 44]. In Iran, “students of medicine are required to take the course ‘Medical Terminology’ as a complementary section of EMP course” [8].

According to Radu M., medical terminology is an important part in learning medical English. Terminology-centered study allows the students to overcome the obstacles and makes the study easier and more effective [5]. Our investigation demonstrated overall positive assessment of the subject by the students. Thus, all this proves that the decision to teach medical terminology to the English medium students was correct.

In conclusion, the opinion of the teachers throughout the world and findings of our survey demonstrate practicality of the course *English Medical Terminology* taught to English medium students. Students’ opinion on the subject elicited during on-going needs analysis can show the ways of improving the teaching process.

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**Summary.** The article deals with the study of attitude of international students to the subject *English Medical Terminology* as well as the analysis of key factors determining importance of this discipline for them.

**Key words:** linguistic difficulties, English medium students, English Medical Terminology.

**Анотація.** Стаття присвячена вивченню ставлення іноземних студентів до предмету «Англійська медична термінологія», а також аналізу ключових факторів, які обумовлюють важливість даної дисципліни для них.

**Ключові слова:** мовні труднощі, англомовні студенти, «Англійська медична термінологія».