



**UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA**

***ENGLISH LANGUAGE NEEDS OF MEDICAL STUDENTS IN A PUBLIC  
UNIVERSITY IN MALAYSIA***

**WAN NUR SYAZWANI BINTI WAN ABD MALIK**

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UNIVERSITY IN MALAYSIA**

By

**WAN NUR SYAZWANI BINTI WAN ABD MALIK**

**Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra  
Malaysia, in Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Master of Arts**

**April 2017**

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Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in  
fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Arts

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April 2017

**Chairman : Chan Mei Yuit, PhD**  
**Faculty : Modern Languages and Communication**

The majority of the medical schools in the world use English as the language for teaching and learning. English being the dominant language in medical education has posed a problem in English as a Second Language/ English as a Foreign Language (ESL/EFL) contexts, where proficiency in the English language among students whose first language is not English is lacking. Apart from having to deal with the demanding task of studying written content in English, medical students have to navigate their learning through various activities that require oral communication skills in English.

This study sought to investigate the English language needs of medical students in a public university in Malaysia. Needs analysis was conducted using the English for Specific Purposes (ESP) framework, adopting Johns and Dudley-Evans Model (Ng, 2005; Johns & Dudley-Evans, 1980) that considers perception of student, language teacher and subject teacher.

Specifically, the study examined the English language needs of medical students focusing on Reading, Listening, Writing and Speaking skills in their medical studies. The needs are analysed based on the overall English competency in medical activities and specific needs in each of the four language skills (Reading, Writing, Listening and Speaking). The needs are then ranked, and the perception from both medical students and lecturers are compared.

Data were collected via questionnaires distributed to 226 medical students and 43 medical lecturers, interviews with 4 medical lecturers, and an observation of a teaching session between medical students and medical lecturers.

The overall findings showed that there is urgency to address the students' low competence in constructing grammatical sentences and using appropriate tenses. Speaking skills are perceived as the most important by both medical students and lecturers. In the ranking of the needs of students in specific medical activities, it is observed that the students are prioritising activities involving factual knowledge, while the lecturers' priorities are more towards activities involving patient care.

The results of this study can be used to contribute to the designing of an English language programme that addresses needs specific to the target group of medical students in Malaysia's medical schools.

Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk ijazah Master Sastera

## **KEPERLUAN BAHASA INGGERIS PELAJAR PERUBATAN DI SEBUAH UNIVERSITI AWAM DI MALAYSIA**

Oleh

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Bahasa Inggeris telah digunakan dengan meluas dalam bidang perubatan. Majoriti sekolah-sekolah perubatan di dunia menggunakan bahasa Inggeris untuk pengajaran dan pembelajaran. Penggunaan bahasa Inggeris sebagai bahasa utama menimbulkan masalah dalam konteks ESL/EFL (Bahasa Inggeris sebagai Bahasa Kedua/ Bahasa Inggeris sebagai bahasa Asing), di mana kurangnya kemahiran bagi pelajar yang bahasa ibundanya bukan bahasa Inggeris. Selain harus berurusan dengan tugas menulis dalam bahasa Inggeris, pelajar perubatan juga harus menggunakannya dalam pembelajaran latihan komunikasi oral dalam bahasa Inggeris.

Kajian ini bertujuan menyelidik keperluan bahasa Inggeris pelajar perubatan di Universiti Putra Malaysia, sebuah universiti awam di Malaysia. Analisis keperluan ini dilakukan menggunakan pendekatan ESP (Bahasa Inggeris bagi Tujuan Khusus) , mengadaptasi Model Johns dan Dudley Evans (Ng, 2005; Johns & Dudley-Evans, 1980), yang menekankan persepsi pelajar, guru bahasa dan guru subjek.

Secara spesifik, kajian ini mengkaji keperluan bahasa Inggeris pelajar perubatan dengan fokus kepada kemahiran membaca, mendengar menulis, dan percakapan dalam pelajaran perubatan mereka. Keperluan ni dianalisa berdasarkan kompetensi menyeluruh bahasa Inggeris dalam aktiviti-aktiviti perubatan dan keperluan khusus bagi setiap kemahiran bahasa tersebut (membaca, menulis, mendengar, dan percakapan). Keperluan tersebut disusun mengikut kedudukan, dan persepsi daripada pelajar dan pensyarah perubatan dibandingkan.

Data dikumpul melalui borang soal selidik yang diedarkan kepada 226 orang pelajar perubatan dan 43 orang pensyarah perubatan, temuramah bersama 4 orang pensyarah perubatan, dan pemerhatian sesi pembelajaran antara pelajar perubatan dan pensyarah perubatan.

Hasil kajian menunjukkan terdapat keperluan untuk mengatasi masalah kompetensi lemah dalam pembinaan ayat dengan tatabahasa yang betul dan menggunakan perkataan yang bersesuaian. Kemahiran bercakap dilihat sebagai kemahiran yang paling penting bagi kedua-dua pelajar dan pensyarah perubatan. Dalam kedudukan keperluan pelajar dalam aktiviti spesifik perubatan, didapati pelajar lebih memberi keutamaan pada aktiviti yang melibatkan pengetahuan fakta, manakala pensyarah lebih memberi keutamaan pada aktiviti yang melibatkan kebajikan pesakit.

Hasil kajian ini boleh digunakan untuk menyumbang ke arah merekabentuk sebuah program bahasa Inggeris yang mengambil kira keperluan spesifik kumpulan target pelajar perubatan di sekolah-sekolah perubatan di Malaysia.

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I certify that a Thesis Examination Committee has met on 19 April 2017 to conduct the final examination of Wan Nur Syazwani binti Wan Abd Malik on her thesis entitled "English Language Needs of Medical Students in a Public University in Malaysia" in accordance with the Universities and University Colleges Act 1971 and the Constitution of the Universiti Putra Malaysia [P.U.(A) 106] 15 March 1998. The Committee recommends that the student be awarded the Master of Arts.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

EAP	English for Academic Purposes
ELT	English Language Teaching
EMP	English for Medical Purposes
EOP	English for Occupational Purposes
ESP	English for Specific Purposes
GE	General English
LSA	Learning Situation Analysis
PSA	Present Situation Analysis
TSA	Target Situation Analysis

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews the background of the study, statement of problems, research objectives, research questions, significance of study, theoretical perspective, conceptual framework and definition of terms of the research.

#### 1.2 Background of the Study

Hutchinson and Waters (1987, p.19) define English for Specific Purposes (ESP) as “an approach to language teaching in which all decisions as to content and method are based on the learners’ reason for learning.” The concern to make language courses more relevant has led to the emergence of English for Specific Purposes as a movement within the English language teaching enterprise (Richards, 2001). The emphasis put on the learners’ reasons for learning reflects an important principle of ESP. An ESP course designed based on learners’ needs is more likely to produce an effective syllabus targeting the needs of learners rather than the one focusing on general English.

Based on the tree of English Language Teaching (ELT) by Hutchinson and Waters (1987), ESP can be divided into English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and English for Occupational Purposes (EOP) depending on learners’ needs for learning English, either for study purposes or work purposes. Pertaining to medical education, English for Medical Purposes (EMP) can be categorised under EAP if the syllabus is designed for medical students, or EOP if the syllabus is designed for doctors (Tasci, 2007).

An important requisite in ESP is the prominence placed on needs analysis as all ESP efforts presuppose tailor-made teaching for a specific target group of learners. Richard et al. (1992, p.242) describes needs analysis as “the process of determining the needs for which a learner or a group of learners requires a language and arranging the needs to priorities.” The field of medicine requires medical students to study and perform specific activities in English. The widespread use of English in medical education explains the reasons behind the demand for medical English to be taught in medical schools. In order for a course to be beneficial to the learners, curriculum design should start with needs analysis. Brown (1995, p.35) defines needs analysis as the “activities involved

in gathering information that will serve as the basis for developing a curriculum which meet the learning needs of a particular group of students.”

The needs of medical students in learning English have been examined by different researchers on different populations worldwide. For example, Chia et al. (1999) conducted needs analysis to find out the perception of medical students and the faculty on English language needs in a college in Taiwan. For Naruenatwatana and Vijchulata (2000), the perception of English teachers and subject teachers were also considered in conducting needs analysis in Rangsit University, Thailand. On the other hand, Hossain et al. (2010) had chosen to give a writing test instead to the medical students in Bangladesh to assess their understanding of English used in the Anatomy subject. Similar to Hossain et al. (2010), Ohtake and Morren (2011) also gave a writing test to the medical students in Japan and the use and misuse of English preposition is analysed. Overall, studies conducted on needs analysis may vary in terms as to the subjects and instruments involved. Nevertheless, all the needs analysis studies mentioned focused on finding the academic needs of students in the medical educational context.

In Malaysia, only one study has been identified on English for Medical Purposes (EMP). Wan Hurani Osman and Anna Lyn Abu Bakar (2009) investigated solely on the writing skills needs of medical students in Universiti Malaysia Sabah. There were not many studies on EMP for medical students conducted in Malaysia. It is therefore not surprising that there have not been an EMP programme offered in most medical schools in Malaysia.

### **1.3 Statement of Problem**

As English is used in almost every task in a student's medical study, the English proficiency of English as a Second Language (ESL) medical students in performing these tasks is a legitimate concern. Alharby (2005) points out that general English courses at college level were inadequate. The courses offered are not focusing on the target needs of the students.

While it is true that medical students in medical schools are selected from high achieving students who have a higher than average proficiency in general English, it is a misconception to assume they can perform just as well in an EMP situation. Shen (2008) observes in China Medical University that medical students do need help from English teachers to improve their learning skills in medical English. Joshani-Shirvan (2008) reports that medical students in Middle East Technical University do have problems with medical English despite the fact that they have studied English for about six years before they enrolled in the

university. These studies highlight the possible mismatch between English courses for medical students and the needs of the students.

Several studies (Shen,2008; Joshani-Shirvan, 2008, Naruenatwatana & Vijchulata, 2000) have shown that there are gaps in between English learning courses and ESL medical students' linguistic competencies. The course design does not address the medical students' needs and the medical students are having problems communicating technical English. Naruenatwatana and Vijchulata (2000) found that current English courses offered to medical students in Rangsit University, Thailand were not relevant to the academic needs of students. The students still have difficulties in dealing with English for academic purposes although they have obtained good grades in their compulsory Foundation English Courses.

Karimkhanlouei (2012) pointed out that weaknesses in English courses could be because of a lack of a systematic survey done on the courses taught to medical students. A systematic survey need to be conducted to access the medical students' English language needs, in order for the English course offered to them beneficial for their medical studies.

Needs analysis defined as "activities involved in gathering information that will serve as the basis for developing a curriculum, which meet the learning needs of a particular group of students" (Brown, 1995, p.35), must be the starting point from which an effective language instruction programme can be developed for medical students. Determining the students' needs is important as it is a prerequisite for an effective course design (Long, 2005).

In Malaysia, research analysing the EMP needs of medical students is sparse. Only one study has been found that concern medical students' English language needs. Wan Hurani Osman and Anna Lynn Abu Bakar (2009) conducted a research to find out the medical students' problems in writing, specifically grammar and vocabulary. There is no study in Malaysia that focused on entirely four English skills; Reading, Writing, Speaking, Listening.

Thus, considering the current lack of information on the English needs of medical students in Malaysia, this study sought to conduct a comprehensive analysis of English language needs of medical students in a public university in Malaysia which would take into account all the four English language skills, the learning and communication activities specific to medical studies, and the perception of both the students and lecturers.



## **1.4 Objectives and Research Questions**

The objective of this study is to investigate the perceived English language needs of medical students from the point of view of the students and lecturers, and the observed English language difficulties faced by students in a teaching-learning session.

The research questions that the study addressed are:

1. What are the overall English language competence of medical students in their medical studies?
2. What are the specific English language needs of medical students in reading, writing, listening and speaking skills?
3. What is the rank order of English language needs as perceived by medical students and medical lecturers for each of the language skills (reading, writing, listening and speaking)?
4. To what extent do the medical students and lecturers differ in their perception of the students' English language needs for specific activities of each language skills (reading, writing, listening and speaking) in their current medical studies?
5. What are the observed difficulties in the students' use of English language in a ward teaching session?

## **1.5 Significance of Study**

The findings of this study will contribute to the currently sparse literature on EMP for medical student in the ESL context. As most medical schools in Malaysia do not currently offer courses in English for medical studies for medical students, the description of the needs will serve as an important reference for course designers in designing English language courses that address needs specific to the target group of medical students in Malaysia's medical school.

The study, based on the perception of members of the discourse community using collaborative model of student-language teacher-subject matter expert, will contribute towards highlighting the state of English language proficiency among Malaysia's medical students. As information about the subject is currently lacking, the findings of this study would be an important contribution to practitioners of ESP and medical educators.



## 1.6 Theoretical Perspective

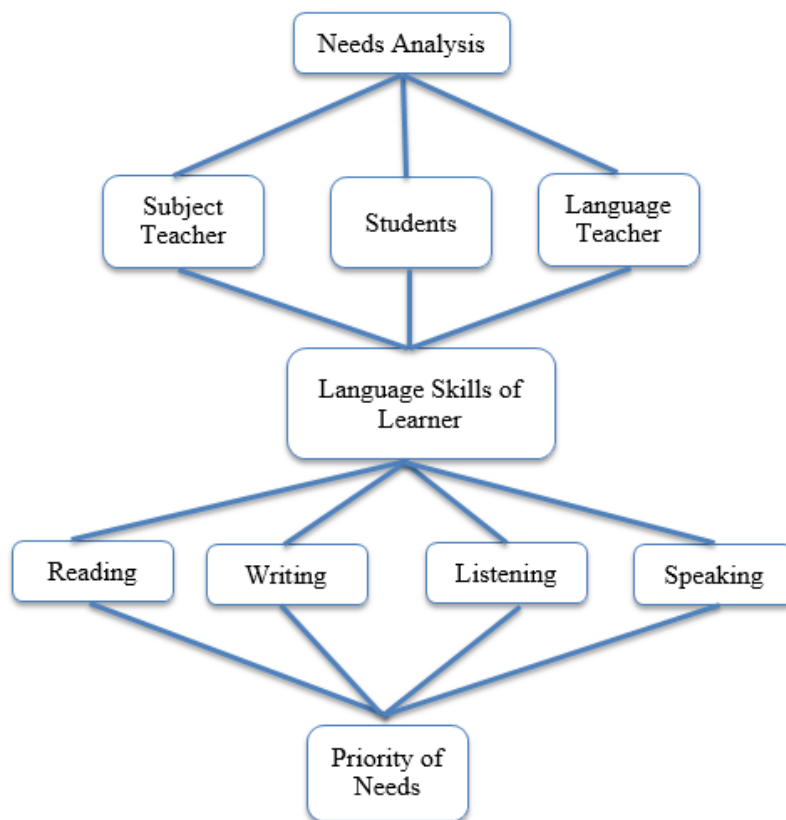
This practically-oriented study is informed by concepts developed in the field of English for Specific Purposes (ESP), specifically the concept of Needs Analysis and the models that guide the framing of appropriate strategies in implementing specific needs analysis projects.

ESP calls for the specific framework to fulfill the needs of the learners in any English programmes. Though programme purposes may seem to be leaning towards the learners, it could be 'language for no purpose' from the learners' point of view (Belcher, 2006). In other words, the English courses offered may still be considered as a general English and not focusing on the targeted needs of learners.

As Long (2005,p.19) observes,

“General (language for no purpose) courses at any proficiency level almost always teach too much, e.g., vocabulary, skills, registers or styles some learners do not need, and too little, e.g., omitting lexis and genres that they do. Instead of a one-size-fits-all approach, it is more defensible to view every course as involving specific purposes...”

For EMP, needs analysis extends the skills in English syllabus, addressing the targeted needs of the medical students in their studies. In the academic context, needs analysis has been recommended to three perspective; the students, subject teacher, and language teacher. This is based on the “Johns and Dudley-Evans Model” (Figure 1) by Johns and Dudley-Evans in 1980, which highlights the collaboration between students, subject teacher and language teacher in ESP teaching. The perceptions from these three sources produce better description of the students' needs and would be helpful in designing an EMP course. Nevertheless, the role of the language teacher is not addressed in this study.



**Figure 1 : Needs Analysis Framework**  
(Ng, 2005; Johns & Dudley-Evans, 1980)

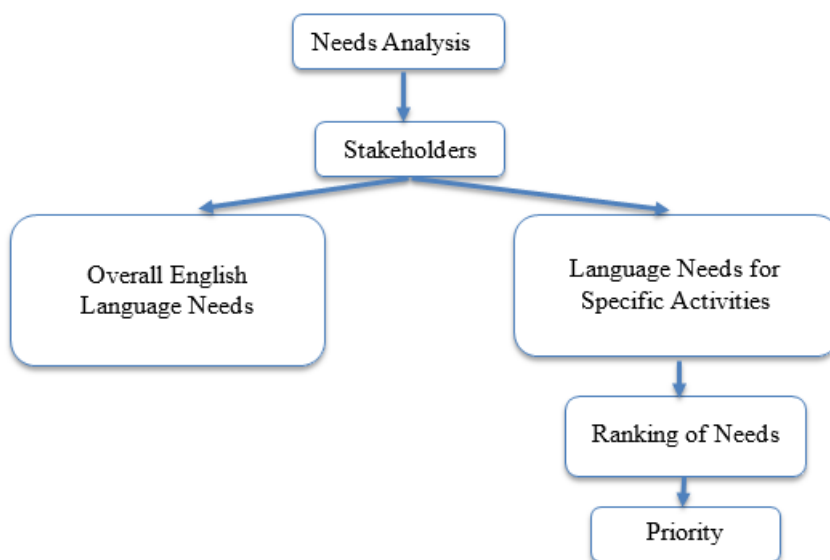
This framework adapted the Johns and Dudley-Evans model (Ng, 2005, p.3; Johns and Dudley-Evans, 1980, p.10) which consider the three-way relationship as a better solution in producing a comprehensive specialised English syllabus for medical students. It involved the perception of students, subject teacher and language teacher. However, the role of language teacher will not be analysed in this study. In addition to support this study, the four language skills (reading, writing, listening and speaking) are included as a part of the framework. The priority of needs is also an important aspect of the study, thus included in the framework. This is supported by Richard et al. (1992) which mentioned about the importance of prioritising needs in needs analysis. The definition of needs analysis according to Richard et. al (1992) is "...the process of determining the needs for which a learner or a group of learners requires a language and arranging the needs to priorities."

The needs of medical students are viewed from two perceptions; students and subject teacher (medical lecturer). Other than perceptions, observation is also made in finding out the needs of the medical students. In this study, the observation is made based on a video recording of a ward teaching session between medical lecturer and medical students.

On dealing with the concept of 'needs', two distinct but complementary approaches are apparent in the literature. One is the qualitative description of needs, where the language and communication skills that are lacking in learners are described in detail. The other approach emphasize the quantitative aspect where a measure is assigned to identify language and communication skills that the learners lack. This quantitative measure thus is assumed to indicate the magnitude of the needs and hence is used as a basis on which decisions are made about which needs should be the focus of remedial action or teaching.

Due to time and budget constraints in needs analysis, needs must be prioritised so that only important needs are targeted. Ranking of needs must take into consideration the ability of learners in carrying out each activity, as well as the degree of relevance of the activity (both learner level and target situation levels of needs) (Chan, 1998). Thus, relevance and ability are the main elements of needs analysis in this study. Low ability and high relevance will make a particular activity a high priority (Chan, 1998, p. 33). Similarly, perception of competence and urgency in addressing the lack may also provide a means for prioritising needs.

## 1.7 Conceptual Framework



**Figure 2 : Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework of this study is mainly based on the concept of needs analysis, in which the needs or what the learners want or have to learn (Hutchinson & Water, 1987) in their English language courses in university is examined. The needs are identified from the perspectives of two stakeholders; the medical students as the learner themselves and the medical lecturers as the one teaching and assessing them throughout their studies.

This study is conducted within the area of EMP, focusing on the English language needs of the medical students in the medical setting. Two aspects are being considered in this study regarding their needs; overall needs and needs in specific activities or skills. The overall English language needs refer to the English language competency of medical students in their medical studies. It considers the extent to which the students and lecturers think that the students are lacking and how urgent both stakeholders think that it should be addressed. Then, the students' English needs are further investigated in the activities for all the four English language skills specifically. The activities are divided according to the skills (reading, writing, listening, and speaking).

The needs of the specific activities are further analysed to highlight the important needs. This is done by ranking the needs, and the results determine which needs should be prioritised than the others. The ranking is done by calculating the “ability’ and “relevance” of each activity stated. The results are arranged according to the language skills. These ranking are then compared to see the differences in priority set as perceived by the students and lecturers. Further discussions are made by including data from the interview sessions with the medical lecturers and observation made during the class.

## **1.8 Definition of Terms**

### **1.8.1 English for Specific Purposes (ESP)**

English as Specific Purposes (ESP) is defined by Hutchinson and Waters (1987) as “an approach to language teaching in which all decisions as to content and method are based on the learners’ reason for learning.” As compared to English for General Purposes (EGP), ESP deals with English in more detail and the language structures and communicative activities taught are specific to the respective fields. In this study, the field of ESP focused on medical students, which is closely related to English for Medical Purposes.

### **1.8.2 General English (GE)**

General English focuses on education whereas ESP focuses on training (Widdowson, 1983). Learners are familiarised with General English in primary and secondary schools. However, as learners enter a specific occupational or disciplinary field, they need to learn the use of language that takes on specialized forms as a manifestation of the socio-cultural context of the field. ESP as a movement in the teaching of English was motivated to serve this purpose.

### **1.8.3 Needs Analysis**

Brown (1995) described needs analysis as the “activities involved in gathering information that will serve as the basis for developing a curriculum which meet the learning needs of a particular group of students.” Desta (2008) reported that there are many language courses that have been designed without first conducting a proper needs analysis. As Kaewpet (2009) said, no ESP courses should be conducted without needs analysis. The importance of needs analysis is also supported by Hutchinson and Waters (1987) who argued that “all courses are based on a perceived need of some sort”. In other words, needs analysis is a tool used in ESP approach to figure out the needs of learners in a specific field.

Courses that are conducted without taking into account the needs of the learner might not be beneficial to the learners at all.

The concept of the “gap” is important in needs analysis. According to Alharby (2005), “needs analysis should fill in the gap of needs between the current state of affairs and the desired state of affairs.” When a gap exists between the current and the desired state of affairs, then there is a need.

Apart from the gap, in order to be practically useful, needs analysis is also concerned about the prioritising of needs. Richard et al. (1992) describes needs analysis as “the process of determining the needs for which a learner or a group of learners requires a language and arranging the needs to priorities.” In other words, needs must be prioritised since not all needs are equal, and time and budget constraints in any training programme necessitates that only the most important needs are targeted.

#### **1.8.4 Ability**

The dictionary definition of “ability” according to Merriam-webster online encyclopedia is “the physical or mental power to do something”. In line with this study, the term refers to the English proficiency level of the medical students. In this study, the priority of needs is ranked based on “ability” and “relevance” mean scores (See Chapter 3, Section 3.6.2 for more detail).

#### **1.8.5 Relevance**

In needs analysis, the aspect of “importance” and “frequency” are often included in order to find out the relevance of a particular task. Taylor and Lewie (1990) took “frequency” and “importance” of each activity into their analysis to find out the relevance of each activity done for loan officers of a bank. Koh (1984) and Holden (1995) used “frequency” to measure the relevance of each activity to a job.

For this study, other than “ability”, “relevance” of a particular activity to medical students’ curriculum is also considered. Thus, “relevance” in this study refers to how frequent and how important a particular activity is to medical students. For example, if the “relevance” of an activity is high, and the “ability” for the student is low, then there is a high need.

### **1.8.6 English for Medical Purposes (EMP)**

ESP can be divided into EAP (English for Academic Purposes) and EOP (English for Occupational Purposes). EMP can be categorised as one of the categories under EAP. This study considers the perception of medical students and medical lecturers on the gaps between English courses taught and the medical students' linguistic competencies. EMP uses a variety of specialised medical terminology, and according to Joshani-Shirvan (2008), it is considered as a particular language taught in a particular way (Joshani-Shirvan, 2008).

### **1.9 Summary**

Being the international language of medicine, English plays an important role in medical education. Many researches have shown that there are gaps in between English learning courses and medical students' linguistic competencies. One of the reasons that contributed to this problem is that the needs of the medical students were not accessed or being considered in the making of English curriculum for medical students. In Malaysia, lack of researches has been done to access this situation. This research focuses to analyse the needs of the medical students based on their self-report and also based on the perception and observation from medical lecturers and analyst as a person from linguistic backgrounds. These three-way collaboration seeks to find out the prioritised needs of medical students in a public university in Malaysia based on the aspects of "relevance" and "ability".



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