

## English for Medical Purposes: Identifying Learning Needs of Second-Year Medical Students at the University of Bejaia, Algeria

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**ABSTRACT:** *The aim of this paper is to identify specific English learning needs for second-year students of medicine at the University of Bejaia, Algeria. This aims to support the design of a course in English for Medical Purposes tailored to meet medical students' real needs. To this end, a mixed-methods approach was employed and data were collected via an online survey questionnaire. A sample of 148 medical students participated out of a population of 208 second-year students. The data was analyzed using descriptive statistics and thematic analysis. The results indicate that the majority of students recognize the importance of English for their medical studies and future careers. Speaking skills and vocabulary development were noticeably identified as key areas needing improvement. Students expressed a preference for hybrid learning mode using online platforms and interactive apps. The study concludes that there is a need for a tailored English for Medical Purposes (EMP) course that fulfils the specific needs and preferences of medical students, focusing on practical and communication skills.*

**KEYWORDS:** English for Specific Purposes (ESP), English for Medical Purposes (EMP), Needs Analysis, Learning Needs, Medical Students

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## Introduction

English has become the dominant language of international medical communication, research, and professional collaboration (Maher, 1986). For non-native English-speaking medical students, proficiency in English is no longer optional but a necessity for accessing cutting-edge scientific literature, participating in global conferences, and engaging in cross-border healthcare initiatives (Outemzabet & Sarnou, 2023). In Algeria, where French has traditionally served as the primary medium of medical education, the growing importance of English presents both opportunities and challenges for students and educators alike (Boumaza, 2023). Despite this shift, there remains a critical gap in understanding the specific English language needs of Algerian medical students, particularly at the undergraduate level.

This study targets second-year medical students at the University of Bejaia, Algeria. While previous research has explored the needs of medical professionals (Ouis & Bouhadiba, 2022) or general language challenges in Algeria (Romane & Bahloul, 2023), fewer studies have systematically investigated the linguistic requirements of medical students at this transitional phase of their training. Grounded in the theoretical framework of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987) and Needs Analysis (Munby, 1978), this research aims to identify the precise language skills, learning preferences, and instructional gaps that characterize this population.

The significance of this study lies in its potential to bridge the divide between generic English language teaching and the specialized demands of medical education. By employing a mixed-methods approach to gather data, this study set out to answer the following questions:

1. What are the English language learning needs of second-year medical students at the University of Bejaia, Algeria?
2. What are their preferred learning modes, instructional materials, and settings for learning English?

The findings of this study shall not only contribute to the scarce research on students' real needs for EMP in the Algerian context but also provide insights for course designers, stakeholders, and medical educators striving to enhance English language instruction in Algerian universities.

## Literature Review

Identifying the English learning needs of medical students is an essential step in designing a medical English course that ensures they are adequately prepared to engage in successful international communication with peers. Research on this topic reveals a growing awareness of the need for tailored English language instruction within medical departments, particularly in non-English speaking contexts. A thorough understanding of these needs is crucial, not only for effective communication but also for designing an effective EMP course that directly aligns with their academic and professional goals. Therefore, this section explores the theoretical foundations, empirical research, and existing gaps in understanding the English language needs of second-year medical students at the University of Bejaia, Algeria, to address this critical need for targeted instruction.

### English for Specific Purposes (ESP)

The literature shows that there is not only one definition of ESP. Hutchinson and Waters (1987) arrived at a feasible definition that English for Specific Purposes (ESP) is an approach to learning English and not a product that teachers use to teach English. It is a language learning approach that focuses on the learners' needs. It is all based on the idea of why a learner needs to learn English. ESP, therefore, is an approach for English language teaching with content and method that both align with the learner's own purpose for learning the language. However, Dudley-Evans and St John (1998) believed that defining ESP ought to reflect the fact that teaching ESP employs a methodology that is different from the methodology used in teaching General English. The term "Methodology" refers to the nature of the interaction between the learner and the ESP instructor. They used the terms absolute characteristics and variable characteristics to

define ESP. on the one hand, ‘absolute characteristics’ are related to the fact that the ESP course should meet the specific learner’s needs, have content related to the discipline or profession and use appropriate language, on the other hand, ‘variable characteristics’ indicate that ESP should focus on the targeted learning skills, and teachers are not permitted to teach ESP using any predetermined methodology. Additionally, Dudley-Evans and St John (1998) have used a typical classification tree diagram for ESP that is divided into two main areas, English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and English for Occupational Purposes (EOP). Each area is also divided into other branches.

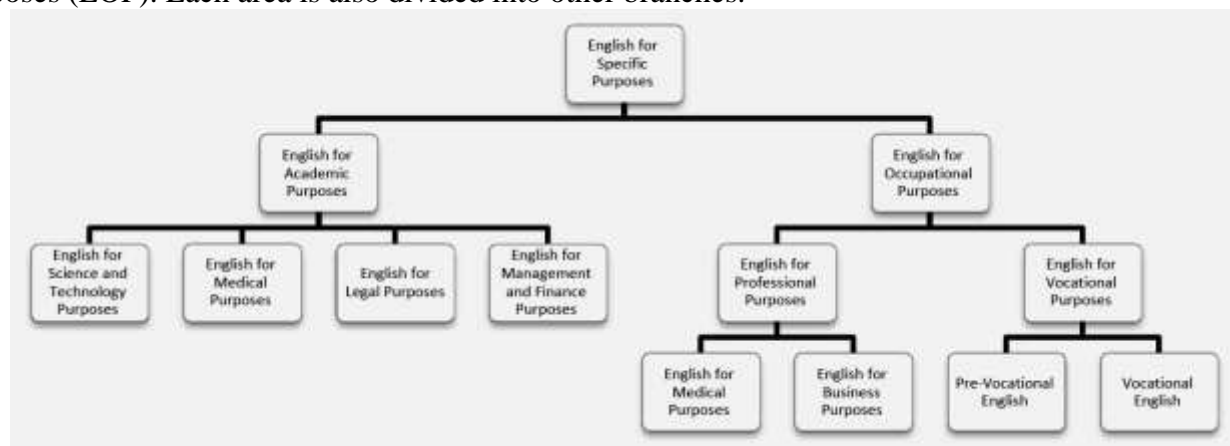


Figure 1. ESP classification by Area. (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998, as cited in Molhim, 2011)

### Needs Analysis in ESP

Every English course, ESP or GE, is designed on the basis of some perceived needs. The need for learning English is often stated in both GE and ESP courses. The difference between English for Specific Purposes and General English is not, then, the existence of a need; it is the awareness of that need. All English courses should emerge from the analysis of learners’ needs. What distinguishes an ESP learner from a GE learner is the awareness of a target situation and the existence of a specific need to communicate in English (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). Munby’s (1978) Communicative Syllabus Design is the most accurate and well-known work on needs analysis. It is a very detailed procedure to identify the target situation needs. This procedure is known as the Communication Needs Processor (CNP). It consists of a list of questions about core communication aspects. Munby’s work demonstrates a language-centred approach to needs analysis. Hutchinson and Waters (1987) recategorised needs analysis incorporated not only on the target situation, which is why the learner is learning the language, but also on learning needs, which is how the learner learns the language. However, Dudley-Evans and St John (1998) saw needs analysis as the process of identifying the linguistic and communicative requirements of learners in their target environment.

### English for Medical Purposes (EMP)

EMP, according to Maher (1986), is the teaching of English for medical professionals. The EMP course is designed to fulfil specific medical learners’ needs, specialized in the medical field and targets particular skills medical learners require for writing medical papers or preparing an oral presentation. English for Medical Purposes textbooks began to emerge in the early 1960s in Japan, Soviet Union, China and other non-English-speaking countries (Maher, 1986).

### Needs Analysis for Medical English Education in Algeria

In Algeria, French has always been used as a medium of instruction in medical education. However, there have been some attempts to incorporate English into medical curricula as English has become the language of science, technology and international communication. This would justify the scarcity of research in this

field. Few studies have been conducted on identifying specific needs for English among Algerian medical students. Analysis by Ouis and Bouhadiba (2022) concluded that medical students at the University of Annaba are conscious of the role of the medical English course to, especially; improve their reading and writing of research papers. A more recent study carried out by Outemzabet and Sarnou (2023) highlighted that medical academics in The University Hospital of Bejaia are also aware of the need to use English to engage in the global medical community by practicing different skills while performing tasks related to their domain and participating in international conferences. Similarly, Boumaza (2023), in a recent study, investigated the challenges that medical doctors face in using English. He found out that exposure to English plays a pivotal role in doctors' language proficiency and preference as well. Doctors confronted difficulties understanding English mainly because of their limited knowledge of its grammar and vocabulary. The same study revealed that medical doctors express a necessary need to work on improving their speaking skills because they think it is important to communicate during their business trips. Overall, the medical curriculum in Algerian universities should place English as a subject during the whole course for at least three hours per week with a content that focuses on improving medical students' vocabulary and developing their reading and speaking skills (Romane & Bahloul, 2023).

It is worth noting that although there is a growing body of research on needs analysis for English for Medical Purposes, few of them focus on identifying the English learning needs of medical students in depth. The literature within English for Medical Purposes predominantly focuses on the target situation analysis examining the needs of professionals rather than those of students. Consequently, the present study addresses this gap by identifying the specific English learning needs of medical students at the University of Bejaia, Algeria.

## **Methodology**

This section discusses and explains the data collection and analysis methods used in this study which aims at identifying the English learning needs for second-year students of medicine at the University of Bejaia, Algeria. The body discussion includes research approach, sample and sampling strategy and data collection and analysis methods.

### **Research Approach**

This study adopted a mixed methods research design. This approach incorporates both quantitative and qualitative elements (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The study employed an online Google Forms self-administered questionnaire to investigate English learning needs among second-year students of medicine at the University of Bejaia, Algeria. Mixed-methods approach allows for an in-depth exploration of students' aspirations and viewpoints regarding learning English for medical purposes (Long, 2005).

### **Sample and Sampling Technique**

A purposive sampling method was employed. The goal was to collect survey responses from a population of 208 second-year students studying medicine at the University of Bejaia during the academic year 2023-2024. Participants were given enough time to fill in a questionnaire anonymously. In total, 148 students participated in this study. Second-year medical students were purposively selected; as this is the only academic year in which medical students at the University of Bejaia undertake a medical English course. The sample comprises 20 male and 128 female students aged between 19 and 25. The sample students speak either of the two Algerian official and national languages, Arabic and Tamazight.

### **Data Collection**

A self-administered online questionnaire on Google Forms was designed and distributed in class to the participants. The questionnaire was adapted from the works of Hutchinson and Waters (1987) on needs analysis. The questionnaire was in three sections, a statement of consent, students' demographic

information and their learning needs of medical English. It consisted of both open-ended and closed-ended questions.

Prior to the main data collection, the survey questionnaire was pilot-tested with a small group of second-year medical students (n=3) to ensure clarity and to identify any possible ambiguities. The final version of the questionnaire was administered online via a Google Forms link. The link was distributed to students in a formal setting during regular English language classes by the researcher and two other colleagues. To maximize participation in the questionnaire and ensure accurate data collection, the researcher and the two collaborating teachers explained the purpose of the study and provided technical and linguistic support to the participants. Students were given enough time during class to complete the questionnaire. Later on, the link to the questionnaire was posted on a Facebook group to enable other students to participate in the study.

## Data Analysis

The data collected from the questionnaire were analysed quantitatively and qualitatively through descriptive statistics and thematic analysis. Descriptive statistics were used to describe the characteristics of the sample, such as students' demographics, age range and first language. The statistical analyses were conducted using SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) software. Thematic analysis is used to analyse qualitative data generated from open-ended questions. To mitigate confirmation bias in the thematic analysis, we adhered to Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step process: familiarisation, coding, generating themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and writing up. Thematic analysis was conducted using Microsoft Excel and Google Gemini generative AI.

## Results

This section describes the main findings of the questionnaire. It includes merely results directly relevant to the research aim and objectives. It also describes discoveries, trends, or insights revealed by analysis of the raw data.

### 1. Demographic Information

The following data presents demographic information about the sample of the study used to identify English learning needs for second-year students of medicine.

#### *Participants' Gender*

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent	Mean	Standard Deviation
Valid Male	20	13,5	13,5	13,5		
Female	128	86,5	86,5	100,0		
Total	148	100,0	100,0		1.86	.343

Table 1. Participants' Gender

Table 1 shows the gender distribution of the participants. The sample comprises 148 students, with a significant majority being female (n = 128, 86.5%). Only 20 participants were male (13.5%) with a standard deviation of (SD = .343). This indicates a clear domination of females over males.

#### *Age*

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent	Mean	Standard Deviation
Valid 18 - 20	127	85,8	85,8	85,8		

21 - 25	21	14,2	14,2	100,0		
Total	148	100,0	100,0		1.14	.350

Table 2. Participants' Age

Table 2 presents the age of the participants in the study. Most participants (n = 127, 85.8%) are in the 18-20 age group. A smaller portion of the participants (n = 21, 14.2%) are in the 21-25 age group with a standard deviation of .350.

#### First Language

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent	Mean	Standard Deviation
Valid Arabic	91	61,5	61,5	61,5		
Tamazight	57	38,5	38,5	100,0		
Total	148	100,0	100,0		1,39	,488

Table 3. Medical Students' First Language

Table 3 reveals that the majority of students (61.5%) reported Arabic as their first language, while 38.5% identified Tamazight as their L1. The mean value of 1.39 (on a nominal scale where Arabic = 1 and Tamazight = 2) suggests a slight predominance of Arabic speakers, with a relatively balanced distribution given the standard deviation of 0.488, indicating moderate variability in language background among respondents.

## 2. Learning Needs of Second-year students of Medicine

This section explores second-year medical students' English learning needs, adapted from a checklist for analysing learning needs developed by Hutchinson and Waters (1987).

#### Importance of English

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Yes	119	80,4	80,4	80,4
No	1	,7	,7	81,1
Maybe	28	18,9	18,9	100,0
Total	148	100,0	100,0	

Table 4. Perceptions on the Importance of English in Medical Students' Studies and Careers

The data presented in Table 4 summarizes the responses of the participants regarding the perceived importance of English. As can be observed, the majority of the respondents (n=119, 80.4%) indicated that English is necessary for their studies and future career. A small fraction (n=1, 0.7%) expressed that English is not important, while a notable portion (n=28, 18.9%) were undecided.

#### Study Mode

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid In Person	42	28,4	28,4	28,4
Online	48	32,4	32,4	60,8



Hybrid	54	36,5	36,5	97,3
Other	4	2,7	2,7	100,0
Total	148	100,0	100,0	

Table 5. Medical Students' Preferred Mode for Learning English

Table 5 shows the medical students' preferences for different English language study modes. The data indicate a diverse range of preferences, with no single mode dominating overwhelmingly. The most preferred mode is "Hybrid" (combining in-person and online instruction), chosen by 54 students (36.5%), followed closely by "Online Mode" (48 students, 32.4%). "In-Person" instruction was favoured by 42 students (28.4%), while a minority of 4 students (2.7%) indicated "Other" preferences such as learning English on their own or by having a private tutor.

#### English Language Skills

		Responses		Percent of Cases
		N	Percent	
Language skills <sup>a</sup>	Listening	67	21,1%	45,3%
	Speaking	129	40,7%	87,2%
	Reading	55	17,4%	37,2%
	Writing	66	20,8%	44,6%
Total		317	100,0%	214,2%

a. Dichotomy group tabulated at value 1.

Table 6. Essential English Language Skills for Medical Students

Table 6 presents the findings on the English language skills essential for second-year medical students. Speaking was the most important skill students want to develop, with 129 students indicating this (40.7% of responses, 87.2% of cases). Listening and Writing were selected by a similar number of students, with 67 (21.1% of responses, 45.3% of cases) and 66 (20.8% of responses, 44.6% of cases) respectively. Reading was least skill to develop, with 55 students indicating this (17.4% of responses, 37.2% of cases).

#### Language Aspects

		Responses		Percent of Cases
		N	Percent	
Language Aspects <sup>a</sup>	Grammar	55	18,0%	37,2%
	Vocabulary	96	31,5%	64,9%
	Pronunciation	101	33,1%	68,2%
	Culture	53	17,4%	35,8%
Total		305	100,0%	206,1%

a. Dichotomy group tabulated at value 1.

Table 7. Language Aspects Medical Students Needs to Develop

Table 7 shows language aspects that second-year medical students need to develop. Pronunciation is the aspect most frequently cited, with 101 students (33.1% of responses, 68.2% of cases) said that they need to improve it. Vocabulary development is also identified as a significant need; a total of 96 students (31.5% of responses, 64.9% of cases) selected it. Grammar and Culture were identified by a smaller number of students, (18.0% of responses, 37.2% of cases) and (17.4% of responses, 35.8% of cases) respectively.

#### 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning Skills

		Responses		Percent of Cases
		N	Percent	
21 <sup>st</sup> century learning skills	Communication	129	40,1%	87,2%
	Creativity	81	25,2%	54,7%
	Collaboration	64	19,9%	43,2%
	Critical Thinking	48	14,9%	32,4%
Total		322	100,0%	217,6%

a. Dichotomy group tabulated at value 1.

Table 8. 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning Skills Medical Students Need to Develop

Table 8 illustrates what 21st-century learning skills participants want to improve. Communication skill was perceived as the most crucial, with 129 students (40.1% of responses, 87.2% of cases) indicating this need. Creativity was the second most frequently cited skill, with 81 students (25.2% of responses, 54.7% of cases) identifying it as an area for development. Collaboration was selected by 64 students (19.9% of responses, 43.2% of cases), and Critical Thinking was recognized as important by 48 students (14.9% of responses, 32.4% of cases).

#### Materials Format for English Learning

		Responses		Percent of Cases
		N	Percent	
Instructional Materials Formats <sup>a</sup>	Online Platforms	112	24,7%	75,7%
	Interactive Apps	79	17,4%	53,4%
	Multimedia Content	73	16,1%	49,3%
	Textbooks	62	13,7%	41,9%
	PDF	57	12,6%	38,5%
	Worksheets	35	7,7%	23,6%
	Handouts	34	7,5%	23,0%
	Other	2	0,4%	1,4%



Total	454	100,0%	306,8%
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a. Dichotomy group tabulated at value 1.

Table 9. Medical Students' Preferred Materials Format for English Learning

Table 9 presents the findings on medical students' preferred materials formats for English language learning. The results indicate a strong preference for digital and interactive formats. Online Platforms are the most preferred format, with 112 students (24.7% of responses, 75.7% of cases) indicating this preference. Interactive Apps are also highly favoured, with 79 students (17.4% of responses, 53.4% of cases) expressing this preference. Multimedia Content was preferred by 73 students (16.1% of responses, 49.3% of cases). Traditional formats such as Textbooks, PDFs, Worksheets, and Handouts were less preferred, with lower percentages of students selecting these formats.

#### Setting for the English Class

		Responses		Percent of Cases
		N	Percent	
English Class Setting	Classroom	84	44,4%	57,1%
	Language Lab	62	32,8%	42,2%
	Auditorium	37	19,6%	25,2%
	Other	6	3,2%	4,1%
Total		189	100,0%	128,6%

a. Dichotomy group tabulated at value 1.

Table 10. Medical Students' Preferred Setting for the English Class

Table 10 shows the participants' preferences for their English class setting. The classroom is the most preferred place, with 84 students (44.4% of responses, 57.1% of cases) indicating this preference. The Language Lab is also among the most preferred settings, with 62 students (32.8% of responses, 42.2% of cases) favouring it. The Auditorium is the least preferred place for the English class, with 37 students (19.6% of responses, 25.2% of cases) selecting it. It is worth noting that a few students (3.2%) indicated preference for other settings, including home and distance learning.

#### Weekly Time for the English Classes

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent	Std. Deviation
Valid 1 hour and 30 minutes	96	64,9	64,9	64,9	
3 hours	37	25,0	25,0	89,9	
4 hours and 30 minutes	5	3,4	3,4	93,2	
6 hours	7	4,7	4,7	98,0	
Other	3	2,0	2,0	100,0	

Total	148	100,0	100,0	0,921
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Table 11. Medical Students' Preferred Weekly Time for the English Classes

Table 11 presents the findings on medical students' preferred weekly time allocation for their English classes. It is clear from the results that most students, 96 out of 148 (64.9%), prefer to study English for 1 hour and 30 minutes per week. A substantial portion of 37 students (25.0%), prefer 3 hours per week. The remaining options, 4 hours and 30 minutes and 6 hours, are indicated by only a minority of students (3.4% and 4.7%, respectively). A few students (2%) referred to implementing English as a medium of instruction in the department of medicine.

### Learning Strategies

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Practical Communication	25	16,9	34,7	34,7
	Interactive Learning	22	14,9	30,6	65,3
	English Medium Instruction	11	7,4	15,3	80,6
	Addressing Challenges	10	6,8	13,9	94,4
	Teacher-Led Instruction	4	2,7	5,6	100,0
	Total	72	48,6	100,0	
Missing	System	76	51,4		
Total		148	100,0		

Table 12. Medical Students' Strategies to Learn English for Medical Purposes

Table 12 summarises the thematic analysis of the data obtained from medical students on the strategies they aspire to learn EMP. Almost a third (16.9%) of coded responses highlighted a need for practical communication in the English class. A slightly similar portion (14.9%) of respondents urged the application of interactive and engaging learning strategies, such as the use of online platforms and apps. 7.4% of the coded responses suggested the integration of English as a medium of instruction for medical studies. Some other respondents (6.8%) expressed their challenges and concerns about their studies and English learning, such as using French as a medium of instruction which they do not want. Finally, teacher-led instruction, i.e. the need for competent teachers was the least frequently reported strategy, cited by only 2.7%.

### Discussion

The results of the current research present clear evidence of the University of Bejaia second-year medical students' English language learning needs. The results indicate that students recognise the importance of English both in their current academic studies and future careers. This awareness attests to increasing student recognition of English's roles in learning medical information, international cooperation, and communication in multilateral environments. Among the most interesting findings of the study is students' strong interest in improving their speaking. This indicates that students may have difficulties expressing medical concepts orally, be it in scholarly discourse, practice, or presentation. Besides speaking, pronunciation and vocabulary were also cited skills students need to improve. These results show that students are seeking functional language tools that will enable them to communicate effectively and

accurately in healthcare contexts. Listening and writing were also significant concerns, although less so. Reading, however, was a skill students felt most confident in, perhaps because of greater exposure to written healthcare content than spoken communication. The second important finding is the desire for mixed learning environments expressed by the students. A combination of offline and online learning is the most preferred learning format. This preference suggests that learners enjoy the structured nature of learning in class and the convenience and flexibility of computer-based facilities. Furthermore, interactive software and online platforms were the most popular materials for learning English, suggesting a shift towards computer-based and self-access materials. In terms of instructional settings, students preferred regular classrooms and language labs. These may be due to the requirements of a properly organised, focused setting where they can receive instant feedback and adequately exercise their language abilities. The questionnaire also shows that students prefer shorter, focused English lessons per week. Most participants opted for one hour and thirty minutes per week, reflecting a desire for frequent but moderate language exposure that can be accommodated within their demanding medical studies. When asked how their English can be improved, students emphasised hands-on communication and engaging learning. Seldom did students cite teacher education, which hinted at a willingness to join in as compared to simple listening. Some students supported the implementation of English as a medium of instruction in medical departments.

Overall, the findings suggest that students are required to be able to speak freely, to use proper vocabulary, to take initiative in communication, and to possess interactive educational technology. These points will reveal how to create an EMP course that meets the students' academic, linguistic, and technological needs.

### **Limitations and Future Directions**

The results are limited in the fact that they cannot be generalized. Future work could examine longitudinal needs in each of the medical seven years, as well as interviewing faculty opinions and practitioners. Experimental studies could also evaluate proposed EMP interventions in terms of efficacy.

### **Conclusion**

This study presents the analysis of second-year medical students' distinct English language learning needs at the University of Bejaia, Algeria. The results confirm that students not only consider English as a tool for studying but also as a gateway to international medical conversations and professional development. The findings highlight the increased attention to oral and vocabulary skills acquisition in EMP course, preferably through hybrid pedagogical strategies and technology-based instruction.

The results validate the fact that students from various global contexts, whether from Algeria, Japan, or Sweden have the same language problems when pursuing the medical profession in a globalised world. The study provides a timely addition to the scarce literature relating to Algerian medical English needs, bridging a gigantic void in both nationwide academic research and institutional planning. It outlines students' shifting learning needs, namely the need for digital means and authentic communication contexts. In addition, students' desire for a more interactive, contextually based English course requires an urgent pedagogical transformation.

### **Recommendations for Implementation**

To implement these findings, course developers, English instructors, and medical staff will need to collaborate to create an EMP syllabus that is communicative, technology-based, and aligned with international medical discourse. Such a course would not only improve language competence but also build confidence and readiness among future Algerian doctors to operate in an increasingly English-dominant international medical community. Subsequent research would need to consider longitudinal research across medical training years and cross-compare needs by region and university to create a national model for

EMP instruction in Algeria. Incorporating faculty perspectives and testing out various pedagogical models such as flipped classrooms or EMI environments would further enhance the applied usefulness of such research.

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