

English Language Teaching Work Force at Iran's Medical Universities a Descriptive Study

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Abstract

Background and Purpose: This study intends to identify the numbers and some characteristics of the teachers of various English courses offered at medical universities affiliated to the Ministry of Health during the second semester of the academic year 2005-6.

Methods: The methods used in this research were "gathering existing data", and "descriptive study". The research was conducted by sending a questionnaire to 41 medical universities. The data from 40 questionnaires received, were arranged in 5 tables.

Results: It was found that during the semester studied, in all, about 1795,5 credits of different courses of English were taught by 254 teachers including 52 credits of pre-university English, 1083,5 credits of general English and 660 credits of specialized English(ESP). Out of the total of 1795,5 credits, 815,5 credits (45.5%) were taught by the English teachers of the language departments of the same universities (64 teachers); 612 credits (34) by visiting English teachers (96 teachers); and the rest, about 368 credits (20.5%) by teachers with different medical or paramedical specialties, being faculty members of different medical or paramedical departments of the same universities (94 teachers).

Conclusion: There is a clear lack of English lecturers graduated in English language. Since our goal of teaching English language in universities of medicine is that students be competent in understanding the meaning of original text and research articles and communicate well in international academic circles we need faculties that are specially trained for teaching English language. The number and the quality of English teachers in universities of medicine should be improved.

Key words: ENGLISH, ENGLISH TEACHERS, MEDICAL UNIVERSITIES, STATISTICS, ESP

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Introduction

At present, in medical universities, a wide range of teachers including associate professors, assistant professors, instructors and even teachers with bachelor's degrees, in various fields

of studies are teaching different courses of English which include pre-requisites, general and specialized English.

Having the documented statistics of these teachers, together with some of their characteristics such as their sex, rank, degree, field of study, the universities from which they graduated, the average number, and the type of English course credits they teach every semester would be of great help to the corresponding authorities in universities and especially in the Ministry of Health in many ways. For example,

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planning of any educational programs for English language courses at universities or any other program in which English courses play a part, without having adequate information about the teaching force in this subject will result in problems often making it very difficult, if not impossible. This study intended to provide an accurate image of the teaching workforce in medical universities.

So far neither the Ministry of Health nor any universities or research centers have tried to provide such image. However, during the last few years some of the Planning and Examining Boards in the office of the deputy for academic affairs of the Ministry of Health, at the Secretariat of the Council of Basic Medical Sciences Education tried to provide some statistics of the lecturers of some major subjects in the medical universities. For example in 2005(1), the Examining Board of biochemistry, and in 2004(2) the Examining Board of pathology made an effort to provide some statistics regarding lecturers of these two subjects. To achieve this, the two boards sent questionnaires to medical universities. But in both cases, the questionnaires they had sent were far simpler and different from that used in this study. Moreover, the aims they had greatly differed from those of this research.

Methods and Material

In this descriptive study a questionnaire was used to collect the related information of all 41 medical universities and schools affiliated to the Ministry of Health(3). In addition to these 41 universities, there are a few more medical universities such as Shahed, Baghiatollah, Artesh (army) medical universities and some medical schools affiliated to the Islamic Azad University, all of which follow the policy of their own parent organizations. Since, in many aspects, they act independently of the Ministry of Health their English teachers and English courses were excluded from this research.

To carry out the research, a questionnaire, in the form of a table, was designed and prepared. This included questions about the number of

English teachers at each university, their fields of study, degree and academic rank, the university they have graduated from as well as the type and the number of English course credits they taught in the 2nd semester of academic year 2005-6. The questionnaire was sent through the office of deputy for academic affairs of Ministry of Health the Secretariat of Basic Medical Sciences Education, to 41 medical universities. Forty universities completed and returned the questionnaire correctly. One university (medical university of Ghom) failed to do so.

Thus, the overall response rate was 97.5. The data extracted from the questionnaires were classified and arranged in 5 tables. Table 1 collected data regarding the number, gender, discipline and academic rank of the three groups of teachers (English teachers of language departments, English teachers being members of other departments and without a degree in English, and the third group, guest lecturers). Table 2 collected the data regarding the country where the teachers had studied. Table 3 gathered data regarding the university from which the English teachers with a degree in English had graduated, and table 4 gathered the number of English course credits offered in each university in the studied semester, and finally in table 5, the data were related to the number of English course credits each of the 3 groups of teachers had taught. By using the data in these tables, the following ratios were calculated: 1) the ratio of the number of all English teachers to that of all English course credits taught in the term being studied; 2) the ratio of the number of teachers of the language departments to those teaching English with no degree in English and being faculty members of other departments; and finally 3) the average number of English course credits per teacher.

Results

In the second semester of academic year 2005-6, in 40 medical universities affiliated to the Ministry of Health, 254 teachers (168 men and 86 women) were teaching 1795,5 different English course credits such as prerequisite

general and specialized English. Of these, 96 were visiting teachers, and the other 158 were faculty members of the respective universities or schools (table 1). Of 158 faculty members teaching the different courses of English, 64 had an academic degree in English language of whom 13 had PhD degrees, 50 had Masters degree and one teacher had just a BA degree in English, the other 94 had no academic diploma or specialty in English. They were invited to teach English (mainly specialized English), apparently for the two following main reasons: (1) they had a PhD or a Masters and were specialized in the students' disciplines - though these specialties in some cases, had little to do with the fields of study of the students being taught ESP. (2) They were believed to have an acceptable competency

in teaching English. Of the 94 subject specialist teachers, 39 had been graduated from a university in an English speaking country and 55 had completed their studies in an Iranian university. It needs to be mentioned that the English proficiency of none of these teachers is usually tested whether it be, by someone in their own discipline department or by a member of the English language department. Table 2 shows the country in which the English teachers took their degrees. Of those English teachers with an academic degree in English (whether guest lecturers or faculty members of the respective university) who had received their degrees from Iranian universities, 35 graduated from the Azad university; 22 from Shiraz university; 20 from Tehran university; 17 from Alameh-Tabatabaee

Table 1. English teachers of medical universities: their academic rank, gender, and discipline

Academic rank	Type of discipline		Specialty department teachers without a degree in English language		Guests lecturers				Total women/men		Grand total
	Gender		Language department teachers with a degree in English language		With a degree in English language		With a degree other than English language				
	Man	Woman	Man	Woman	Man	Woman	Man	Woman	Man	Woman	
Associate professor	1	1	2	-	-	-	-	-	3	1	4
Associate professor	7	4	44	6	3	1	1	-	55	11	66
Instructor	33	17	27	11	42	29	6	-	107	57	164
Bachelor (expert)	-	1	-	4	3	10	-	2	3	17	20
Total	41	23	73	21	47	40	7	2	168	86	254
Grand Total	64		94		87		9		254		

Table 2. Countries where the teachers of English courses have completed their studies

Place of study	Type of teachers	Language department teachers with a degree in English	Teachers of specialty departments, without a degree in English	Guest lectures		Total
				With a degree in English	With a specialty other than English	
IRAN		47	55	80	8	190
English speaking countries		17	39	7	1	64
Total		64	94	87	9	254

university and the rest (34 teachers) had finished their studies in other Iranian universities (table 3).

It must be pointed out that of the total of 64 English teachers, members of English departments, one with a PhD degree and 6 with a Master degree had completed their studies in the field of general linguistics-a discipline that is not directly related to language teaching (or TEFL). In the semester being studied, a total of 1795.5 credits of different English courses were taught in 40 medical universities and colleges, of which 52 credits were pre-requisite English, 1083.5 were general English and the other 660 credits were different courses of specialized English (table 4). Of the total of 1795.5 English course credits, 815.5 were taught by the faculty members of the medical universities language departments, 612 credits by guest lecturers and the other 368 credits (mostly specialized English) by the teachers of different medical or paramedical departments (table 5). The greatest number of English course credits were offered in the three largest medical universities of Tehran (219 credits), Isfahan (157 credits), and Shaheed Beheshti (145 credits).

Discussion

There is a clear lack of English lecturers

graduated in English language. Table 4 shows that in the second semester of academic year 2005-6, collectively 1795.5 credits of pre-requisite, general and specialized English courses were offered in 40 studied medical universities. If all of the credits mentioned are considered to be the responsibility of the university language departments - since all these departments have just 63 academics graduated in English - then each teacher should accept the responsibility of teaching 28 credits which is neither acceptable for the universities nor do the individual teachers have the capacity to handle such a heavy workload efficiently. If each lecturer is according to the educational regulations, obliged to teach 11 credits on the average, then teaching of 1795.5 credits of English in 40 studied universities requires 163 English language teachers. Given the current number of lecturers (64), every department needs at least another 2 to 3 English teachers to avoid having to invite guest lecturers. It should be noted that based on my experience, in medical universities, usually the number of credits offered in the second semester is lower than that offered in the first semester. This indicates that if the number of English teachers and the number of English credits in the first semester be compared, the shortage will be more highlighted. Out of a total of 64 faculty members in language

Table 3. The universities from which English teachers with a degree in English have graduated (including teachers from language departments and lectures)

Academic degree	Name of the universities															English Speaking Countries					Total	
	Tehran	Tarbiat Moddares	Mashad	Shiraz	Tabriz	Alameh-tabatabaee	Isfahan	Alzahra	Yazd	Islamic Azad	School of Social Sciences	Hamadan	Elm-o-sanat (Science and Industry)	School of literature	Khatam (non-profitable)	USA	England	Canada	Australia	India		France
PhD	-	-	-	1	-	3	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	6	1	2	1	1	16
Master	1	5	4	21	3	13	10	4	1	31	-	-	1	-	1	6	4	-	-	2	-	122
Bachelor	4	-	-	-	-	1	-	1	-	4	2	1	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	14
Total	20	5	4	21	3	17	10	5	1	35	2	1	1	1	1	7	10	1	2	3	1	152

Table 4. The number of course credits of pre-university, general and specialized English offered by each of the medical universities in 2nd semester of academic year 1384-85

No	Medical university	No. of credits			
		Pre- requisite English	General English	Specialized English	Total
1	Ardebil	-	20	3	23
2	Booshehr	-	38	6	44
3	Bandar-Abas	-	14	5	19
4	Birjand	-	19	7	26
5	Fasa	8	8	5	21
6	Yasooj	-	8	8	16
7	Gazvin	6	31	15	52
8	Guilan	-	11	9	20
9	Tehran	-	142	77	219
10	Rafsanjan	2	9	10	21
11	Shahr-e-kord	6	9	10	25
12	Orumieh	-	6	3	9
13	Mazandaran	-	12	12	24
14	Gorgan	-	-	6	6
15	Arak	-	24	12	36
16	Babol	-	18	7	25
17	Zahedan	14	20	4	38
18	Kermanshah	-	3	3	6
19	Shaheed Beheshti	-	45	91	145
20	Yazd		62	4	16
21	Tabriz		12/5	34	96/5
22	Ahvaz		35	8	43
23	Shiraz		88	36	124
24	Jahrom		28	16	44
25	Iran		58	46	104
26	Isfahan		83	74	157
27	Bojnoord		10	2	12
28	Sabzevar	12	8	4	24
29	Shahrood	4	9	5	18
30	Kerman		6	4	10
31	Mashhad		33	40	73
32	Zanjan		28	6	34
33	Kurdistan		17	19	36
34	Hamadan		33	6	39
35	Semnan		45	26	71
36	Lorestan		18	10	28
37	Ilam		24	4	28
38	Gonabad		13	2	15
39	Zabol		6	-	6
40	Kashan		21	21	42
Total		52	1083/5	660	1795/5

Table 5. The number of course credits of pre-university, general and specialized English taught by teachers of language departments, specialty departments and guest lecturers

Type of course credits		Pre-university English	General English	Specialized English	Total
Number of course credits taught by:	Teachers of language departments	30	502/5	283	815/5
	Guest lecturers	11	491	110	612
	Teachers of specialty departments	11	90	267	368
Total		52	1083/5	660	1795/5

departments, just 13 are holding the doctorate degree and almost all the rest (50) have their Masters. If one supposes that these 13 PhD holders are divided fairly among the universities' language departments (though this was not the case because seven of them are teaching in just 2 medical universities of Shiraz and Shaheed Beheshti), every 3 universities should have received only one lecturer with a doctorate degree, highlighting the paucity of English lecturers with doctorate degrees in medical universities. Although many English courses could be taught by the holders of Masters' degrees in English, the availability of at least one English lecturer with a doctorate degree in the language department of every university may help to improve English education. Out of 254 lecturers who taught English courses, 103 persons (40%) had no academic degree in the field of language education (Table 1). This number which included 2 associate professors, 51 assistant professors, 44 instructors and 6 bachelors comprised a wide range of academic specialists such as: biochemist, geneticist, parasitologist, entomologist, virologist, immunologist, anesthesiologist, veterinarian, urologist, child education specialist, biomechanist, neuropsychologist, psychologist, G.P., pediatrician, etc.

Though many of these lecturers were invited by the specialty departments of the same university to teach mainly specialized English courses, some of them were given the responsibility to teach some credits of general English too. Most of these specialists were invited to teach by specialty departments of universities that had no well-established and qualified language department. For example, in the medical universities of Shiraz, Isfahan, Tehran and Shaheed Beheshti, which all enjoy well-established language departments, nearly all of the English courses are tutored by the faculties of corresponding language departments. The head of the specialty departments who invites lecturers from their own departments (and not from language departments) justify their decision

by reasoning that subject specific reading texts are understood better by these specialty department faculties than by lecturers of language departments and therefore the lecturers of the related discipline departments are more competent in teaching specialized English courses than teachers of the language departments. As mentioned earlier, sometimes these lecturers accept the responsibility of teaching a number of general English courses. This implies that the pretext of having more knowledge on specialized texts is not the main reason for their invitation to teach ESP. Moreover, some of the ESP courses are tutored by lecturers whose disciplines have nothing to do with those courses. For example, the field of study of one of the English lecturers in Kurdistan Medical University is child education, or in Ardebil Medical University, one of the ESP lecturers has a degree in neuropsychology, and even in Shaheed Beheshti Medical University an academic whose specialty is biomechanics had been asked to teach ESP in the studied semester. One wonders which of the ESP courses in these universities, in any way, could be related to child education, neuropsychology, or biomechanics. The following questions come to mind regarding the invitation of these lecturers to teach English:

Who evaluates their level of proficiency in English and select them as qualified lecturers of ESP?

Who monitors their tutoring?

In English language departments, the heads of the departments, owing to their experience and proficiency in English language and language education could more or less efficiently monitor the standard and quality of their departments English teachers. But, in the Public Health department, for instance, if by any chance there is only one faculty member proficient in English and he / she is appointed by the department head to teach an ESP course to Public Health students, then who is expected to evaluate the suitability of the course taught?

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