

# PERCEPTIONS OF ENGLISH FOR MEDICAL PURPOSES (EMP) MODULE: INSIGHTS FROM STUDENTS AND LECTURERS

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**Abstract.** This study investigates the perceptions of first-year medical students and lecturers regarding an English for Medical Purposes (EMP) module implemented at a private medical university in northern Malaysia. A total of 55 participants were involved, including 45 medical students, 5 medical lecturers, and 5 English language lecturers. The research aimed to understand how the module supports learners' communicative competence in medical contexts. Utilizing a mixed-methods approach, data were collected through student questionnaires and semi-structured interviews with both language and medical lecturers. Findings revealed that students viewed the module as highly beneficial in enhancing their speaking confidence, use of medical terminology, and ability to communicate effectively during clinical role-plays and presentations. Interactive activities such as simulated patient interviews, collaborative discussions, and peer evaluations were especially appreciated. Lecturers observed significant improvements in students' fluency, clarity, and confidence, affirming the module's relevance to real-world medical communication. However, both groups suggested enhancements, including multimedia clinical simulations, spontaneous interaction tasks, culturally responsive communication components, and more personalized feedback. These findings underscore the importance of task-based, learner-centered instruction in medical English education. Grounded in Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, the study highlights how authentic, socially mediated learning experiences support language development in professional healthcare settings.

**Keywords:** *English for Medical Purposes, student perception, medical communication, language pedagogy, sociocultural theory*

## Introduction

Effective communication is essential in medical education, particularly for students in multilingual and multicultural environments like Malaysia. English for Medical Purposes (EMP) courses aim to bridge the gap between general English proficiency and the specialized discourse used in healthcare settings. This study focuses specifically on understanding students' and lecturers' perceptions of an EMP module designed to enhance communicative competence in medical contexts. Grounded in task-based learning and content-based instruction, the EMP module aligns with global educational trends favouring contextual and interactive language instruction (Hyland and Shaw, 2016; Basturkmen, 2015). Drawing upon Vygotsky (1978) Sociocultural Theory, the study examines how social interaction, role-play, and authentic tasks influence learners' confidence and readiness for clinical communication. The integration of English for Medical Purposes (EMP) in medical education has become increasingly necessary due to the specialized communication demands of healthcare environments. Medical students are expected not only to master technical knowledge but also to effectively engage in clinical discussions, patient interviews, and interdisciplinary communication—all of which require a high degree of proficiency in spoken English tailored to medical

contexts (Mazdayasna and Tahririan, 2008; Kang and Park, 2004). As a result, educators and curriculum designers have emphasized the importance of understanding learners' and instructors' perceptions to ensure the alignment of EMP courses with real-world communication needs (West, 1994; Hutchinson and Waters, 1987).

Perceptions of both students and lecturers toward EMP modules are closely associated with how well these courses address contextual, linguistic, and cultural demands. According to Shaalan (2020), one of the primary concerns in EMP delivery is the mismatch between general English instruction and the actual discourse practices within clinical settings. Medical learners often perceive traditional English courses as insufficient, particularly when they are not designed to cover medical terminology, patient interaction, and professional documentation. Instructors similarly report that generic English courses do not reflect the communicative realities faced by students during clinical rotations and professional practice (Lodhi et al., 2018). Students' perceptions of EMP modules are significantly influenced by the degree of authenticity and relevance embedded in course design. When students view tasks, such as role-playing, case presentations, and simulated consultations as reflective of real clinical encounters, their engagement and motivation increase (Franco et al., 2018). This notion is supported by content-based instruction (CBI) and task-based learning (TBL) approaches, which prioritize learning through meaningful tasks that integrate language skills with subject-matter content (Madrid and García Sánchez, 2001). These pedagogical methods emphasize the communicative purpose of language, thus reinforcing the students' view that EMP modules should prepare them for authentic, discipline-specific situations.

Lecturers' perceptions of EMP are shaped not only by instructional outcomes but also by the module's curriculum and assessment design. Studies highlight the importance of systematic course development using curriculum models such as Taba's inductive approach, which promotes flexibility and learner needs analysis (Oliva, 2009). Instructional design frameworks such as the Dick and Carey model ensure alignment between instructional objectives, learning tasks, and assessments, which lecturers value for structured delivery (Dick et al., 2005). When these models are employed, educators are more likely to perceive the EMP module as effective, adaptable, and professionally relevant. Moreover, Vygotsky (1978) Sociocultural Theory underpins many EMP course designs that incorporate collaborative and interactive learning. Language development in medical education is mediated through social interaction, and EMP modules that integrate peer discussion, scaffolded learning, and simulated communication are often better received by instructors who view language acquisition as context-driven (Lantolf and Poehner, 2014). In summary, the literature suggests that both students and lecturers value EMP modules when they are context-specific, pedagogically sound, and informed by theories of language acquisition and curriculum design. These perceptions are essential for the development and continuous refinement of EMP instruction in medical education.

## **Materials and Methods**

A qualitative approach was adopted to examine the research question. The study involved 45 medical students and ten lecturers (five from the medical faculty and five from the language department). Participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure that respondents had direct experience with the EMP module. This approach

allowed for a deep exploration of participant perspectives relevant to the study objectives (Campbell et al., 2020; Punch, 2000). To gather comprehensive data on the perceptions of the English for Medical Purposes (EMP) module, a mixed-methods approach was employed using both quantitative and qualitative tools. The primary instrument for data collection was a questionnaire adapted from Suciayati and Adian (2018), designed to elicit both structured responses through Likert-scale items and open-ended feedback from students and lecturers. This allowed for the collection of standardized quantitative data while also capturing nuanced personal insights relevant to the study's objectives. In addition to the questionnaire, semi-structured interviews were conducted with selected participants to gain deeper understanding of their experiences and perspectives. These interviews provided a platform for participants to elaborate on specific aspects of the EMP module, such as the relevance of the content, clarity of instruction, and the perceived impact on communicative competence. The combination of questionnaire and interview data enabled triangulation, enhancing the richness and credibility of the findings. To ensure the quality of the instruments, validity was established through expert reviews by specialists in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and medical education. These experts assessed the content and structure of the instruments for appropriateness and alignment with the research objectives. Reliability was confirmed through pilot testing, which involved a small sample of participants like the main study population. The consistency of responses from the pilot group provided confidence in the instrument's dependability. For data analysis, descriptive statistics were used to summarize the quantitative findings from the questionnaires, while thematic analysis was employed to interpret qualitative responses from both the open-ended questions and the interviews. This dual analytical approach enabled a well-rounded interpretation of how the EMP module was perceived by its stakeholders.

## **Results and Discussion**

This section of the study aims to answer the research question related to how stakeholders view the module's design, effectiveness, and alignment with educational outcomes. The intention behind this investigation is to identify both strengths in the module's framework and areas that require improvement, thereby enhancing the educational impact of the EMP module.

### ***Students' perception evaluation of the EMP module***

The evaluation of the EMP module was structured around open-ended questions targeting various aspects, including content relevance, presentation design, language clarity, and overall feedback from both students and lecturers. This comprehensive evaluation also emphasized the importance of gathering qualitative data to obtain in-depth insights into the module's effectiveness and usability.

### ***Module content and learning experience***

Students conveyed that the module materials significantly supported their learning objectives. They noted that the practical examples and detailed guidance provided within the module were instrumental in helping them understand and apply complex concepts within real medical contexts. One student stated, "The case studies we analyzed helped me see how to communicate effectively with patients." Furthermore,

they identified the content's high relevance to their medical studies, as it effectively bridged the gap between academic knowledge and practical application in clinical settings. They also reported that the module encouraged independent study, thus inspiring them to utilize additional resources to deepen their understanding of medical English. Students praised the interactive activities within the module for their role in reinforcing learning. A student mentioned, "The quizzes and role-playing exercises made it fun to learn, and they really helped me remember the vocabulary." This hands-on approach was seen as essential for developing skills necessary in clinical practice, highlighting the importance of practical engagement in the learning experience.

### ***Presentation of the module***

In terms of presentation, students consistently praised the organization's clarity and logical structure of the module. One student reflected, "I loved how easy it was to navigate the sections. I could find what I needed without wasting time." They found the content easy to navigate, which facilitated their learning journey. Additionally, the modern examples and exercises were recognized for their applicability to real-world medical situations. This aspect-maintained student interest and underscored the relevance of the content in preparing them for future professional endeavours.

### ***Language and accessibility***

The analysis of language and accessibility also revealed generally positive feedback regarding the clarity of the module's language. Overall, students found the language clear and understandable; however, some indicated that certain complex terms could benefit from further explanation. One student noted, "While most of the language was clear, I struggled with some jargon that I'd never seen before." The module's readability was appreciated, as the layout and formatting contributed to an engaging reading experience. Notably, students suggested that incorporating glossaries for technical jargon could enhance their comprehension of more challenging topics.

### ***General feedback***

The section concluded with a summary of general feedback from students, who highlighted the engaging and practical aspects of the module. They particularly valued interactive components that linked theory to practice, such as clinical scenarios and patient histories. A student shared, "The patient history scenarios made everything feel real; I could really visualize using this in my future practice." When asked for suggestions for improvement, students expressed a desire for more real-world case studies, additional practice exercises, and the integration of technology, such as videos and virtual segments, to further enhance the learning experience.

### ***Analysis of responses to EMP module evaluation: Lecturers' response***

This analysis captures the perceptions of five English lecturers and five medical lecturers regarding the EMP module, focusing on its content alignment, organization, interactive learning opportunities, and the overall effectiveness of assessments in measuring students' understanding. Insights from both groups provided a nuanced perspective that highlighted the strengths and potential enhancement areas for the EMP module.

### ***Module design and delivery***

English lecturers acknowledged that the EMP module effectively aligned with its intended learning outcomes, particularly in fostering students' communication capabilities in clinical contexts. One lecturer remarked, "The module is exceptionally well-designed to meet the needs of medical students who must learn to communicate in specific clinical scenarios." Medical lecturers commended the module for its emphasis on diagnostic reasoning and practical skills, noting that the sequential arrangement of content contributed to the students' comprehensive understanding of foundational and advanced medical concepts. Both English and medical lecturers praised the organization of the module, noting that the structured flow of topics enabled students to develop their English proficiency systematically. Another lecturer pointed out, "The logical progression really helps students build confidence as they tackle more complex topics." This step-by-step approach to language acquisition and clinical communication helped students build confidence and competence through manageable learning segments. Additionally, lecturers highlighted the successful integration of various learning modalities, which reinforced students' comprehension and application of medical English.

### ***Interactivity and engagement***

The analysis further illustrated the module's effectiveness in promoting interactive learning through its extensive use of role-playing exercises, real-world scenarios, and practical communication tasks. Both groups of lecturers recognized that these interactive components enhanced students' practical communication skills and provided valuable opportunities to engage with content meaningfully. A medical lecturer stated, "These interactive activities simulate real-life situations students will encounter, which is essential for their training." The emphasis on cultural sensitivity and communication challenges was also seen as a vital component of the EMP module, preparing students to navigate diverse clinical environments effectively.

### ***Relevance to medical education***

Medical lecturers noted that the assessments employed in the EMP module were effective in reinforcing students' language skills and ensuring preparedness for clinical situations. They emphasized that the scenario-based assessments and oral evaluations allowed students to demonstrate their understanding of language use in various medical contexts. One lecturer observed, "The assessments are very much aligned with real-world demands, allowing students to showcase their skills effectively." English lecturers echoed this sentiment, highlighting the alignment between assessments and learning objectives, as well as the inclusion of real-world tasks that reflected the communication demands of medical practice. The positive reception of the EMP module from students, language teachers, and medical lecturers indicates its effectiveness, relevance, and engaging design as an educational resource. While stakeholders recommended its continued use, there was consensus on the necessity of addressing identified gaps to maximize its impact. By incorporating targeted improvements, guided by participant feedback, the EMP can evolve into an even more impactful module that benefits all stakeholders involved and supports long-term academic and professional success. The analysis underscored the importance of using diverse data sources to validate findings,

ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the module's effectiveness and its significant impact on learners.

The findings align with established literature emphasizing the value of task-based learning and communicative competence in specialized ESP settings (Hyland and Shaw, 2016; Flowerdew, 2015). From a theoretical lens, Vygotsky (1978) Sociocultural Theory is evident in how role-plays and interaction with peers facilitated learning through the Zone of Proximal Development. Students' increased confidence in medical conversations supports this idea of mediated learning through scaffolding and social participation (Rahmatirad, 2020). Furthermore, these perceptions echo findings from studies by Zazzi (2020) as well as Baylor et al. (2019), which advocate for interactive and reflective teaching methods to foster communicative readiness in medical students. The alignment of instructional practices with students' real-world needs contributed to positive perceptions and enhanced learning outcomes. The findings revealed that both students and lecturers held highly favourable views toward the English for Medical Purposes (EMP) module. Students consistently reported enhanced speaking confidence, better command of medical vocabulary, and improved ability to interact in simulated clinical situations. These perceptions reflect the strength of the module's design, which prioritized active engagement through role-play, group discussions, patient simulations, and authentic tasks. The integration of interactive activities mirrors findings by Zazzi (2020), who demonstrated that task-based communication training in medical education significantly improves learners' confidence and fluency, particularly when embedded within realistic professional contexts. From a theoretical perspective, the success of the EMP module aligns with Vygotsky (1978) sociocultural theory, which posits that learning is socially mediated and enhanced through meaningful interaction with more knowledgeable others. In the EMP module, peer collaboration, guided practice with instructors, and reflective journaling created a learning environment that supported the development of communicative competence. Students were exposed to a variety of speaking contexts that required them to articulate complex medical information, ask questions, and negotiate meaning-core aspects of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). This echoes the work of Lantolf and Poehner (2014), who emphasized that scaffolded interaction fosters learners' ability to perform beyond their independent capabilities.

Lecturers reinforced these findings, praising the module's logical progression from foundational language tasks to complex communication scenarios. Drawing upon the Taba model of curriculum design (Oliva, 2009), the EMP module was sequenced to move from controlled practice to freer production, gradually building learners' proficiency. Furthermore, Dick and Carey's instructional model (Dick et al., 2005) was reflected in the clarity of learning objectives and consistent feedback loops, ensuring that students understood both what they were learning and why it mattered. Lecturers acknowledged that the module provided exposure to authentic medical dialogues, reinforcing students' preparedness for real-world interactions. Despite the strengths of the EMP module, both students and lecturers suggested several enhancements. Students expressed interest in more multimedia tools, including video-based simulations and recorded case presentations. These requests are supported by Jones (2016), who found that blended learning tools in EMP courses increased engagement, retention, and application of vocabulary. Additionally, students advocated for more spontaneous speaking activities, such as mock emergency responses, to simulate the unpredictability of real clinical environments. Lecturers echoed this point, noting that while the

module's content was appropriate, it could benefit from additional formative assessments such as reflective portfolios, peer evaluations, and self-assessment checklists (Agha et al., 2015). A recurring theme in the feedback was the need for enhanced training in intercultural communication. Malaysia's diverse population makes it imperative for future healthcare professionals to navigate conversations with patients from different cultural backgrounds. Research by Choi and Lee (2020) underlines the importance of culturally sensitive communication training, particularly in multilingual clinical contexts where misunderstandings can compromise care.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the positive perceptions from both students and lecturers validate the effectiveness of the EMP module as a relevant and responsive educational tool. Its alignment with sociocultural learning theory, practical task-based methodology, and medical discourse contexts ensures that it supports professional communication development. Future improvements should prioritize multimedia integration, emergency language drills, and cultural communication components to further enhance its relevance and impact. This study affirms the positive reception of the EMP module among students and lecturers in a Malaysian medical education context. Key strengths lie in its interactive structure, alignment with clinical communication goals, and contextualized learning activities. Recommendations for improvement include integrating technology, diversifying assessments, and updating content regularly. These enhancements can ensure the continued relevance and effectiveness of the EMP curriculum, contributing to better patient care and professional competence in English-medium medical environments.

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## **Conflict of interest**

The authors confirm that there is no conflict of interest involve with any parties in this research study.

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