

Dental Students' Perceptions of ESP Material and its Impact on Their Language Proficiency: A Case Study of a Saudi Arabian University

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Abstract

The paper aims to explore the dental English for Specific Purposes (ESP) students' perceptions of the ESP material and its influence on their English proficiency in the dentistry department of a Saudi Arabian university. The study adopts a qualitative technique of semi-structured interviews to elicit the views of 12 purposively chosen participants. The process of a thematic analysis of the qualitative data led to the emergence of three overarching themes that aimed to answer the main research question which is how the dental students in the Saudi context perceive the ESP materials and the impact these materials have on their language proficiency. The key findings indicate that the ESP learners in the dentistry department have a very positive attitude towards learning the English language in general and ESP in particular. Their awareness of their linguistic needs makes it a significant study in the field of ESP in Saudi Arabia. The results also suggest that the coursebook contents and material are outdated and inappropriate for the ESP learners in the Saudi English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context. The findings illustrate that the ESP teachers need to use the English language in classrooms and introduce learner-centred interactive activities to encourage students to participate in classroom activities. In light of the findings, the study outlines the implications and gives directions for future research.

Keywords: English proficiency, English for specific purposes (ESP), EFL context, Saudi Arabia

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1.0 Introduction

In contexts where English is spoken as a foreign language, professionals in the field of medical sciences require to develop language proficiency to adequately express themselves in spoken and written English and meet the international standards. The emerging need for English proficiency has forced policymakers to concentrate on English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses around the world and consider it an integral part of EFL teaching. As an approach, ESP aims to tailor English language teaching materials to an identified group of learners' specific learning and language use needs within a particular context (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). This trend is conspicuous in Saudi Arabian universities where ESP courses are offered to ESP students in their respective departments, such as business, engineering, humanities, and medicine. Particularly in medicine, dental students are offered tailored courses in a bid to meet their professional learning needs and develop their language proficiency to be able to interact with scientific research, professionals and patients from various linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Despite the significance of the ESP courses for medical students in general and dental students in particular, the existing courses and materials used in the Saudi EFL setting make an insignificant contribution to the learners' linguistic competence. Therefore, it is essential to evaluate the current course material and assess its effectiveness concerning the learners' expected level of English proficiency.

Teaching ESP is a complex and daunting task as the pedagogical process involves teacher training with a specific focus on multi-disciplinary knowledge development, a wide array of content material that is related to the learners' professional fields and rigorous ways of evaluating material and assessing learners' performances. According to Hutchinson and Waters (1987): "ESP is an approach to language teaching in which all decisions as to content and method are based on the learner's reason for learning" (p. 19). Therefore, researchers around the world have investigated this phenomenon in great depth to assist ESP practitioners and make the courses efficient to meet international standards and global demands.

Over the past two decades, the professional medical bodies have emphasized the need for enhancing the training, development and evaluation of doctors concerning their communication skills, so that they can establish a good relationship between themselves and their patients. Improved communication skills and language proficiency in the English language are equally important for dentists who can learn and develop their skills in a systematic way as part of their dental education. Nevertheless, there seems to be inadequate empirical evidence to determine the effectiveness of ESP courses designed for medical students, particularly the dental students in Saudi EFL context. Hence, this case study calls into question the effectiveness of ESP material that is being used in dental department of a higher education institution in the Saudi Arabia.

The primary aim of this small-scale qualitatively driven case study is to explore the dental students' perceptions of the current ESP course material that is being implemented in the classroom and understand whether the course material has any impact on the dental students' language proficiency. Moreover, the study aims to identify different factors that might hinder the successful implementation of the course material in the Saudi EFL context. This study will be an opportunity to elicit the needs of dental students, the challenges related to the course materials, and how to cope with those challenges. This case study will further give insights into the dental

students' ESP related problems and help understand their needs to revise or modify the course material and syllabus to better meet their English learning needs. Other universities that offer ESP courses in the Kingdom can benefit from this study as it will take into consideration the real-life experiences and observations of dental students in a state university of Saudi Arabia.

1.1 The Objectives of This Study

- To explore the dental students' views about the current ESP material in the Saudi EFL context.
- To understand the impact of the ESP teaching material on the dental students' English proficiency.
- To identify the dental students' needs and expectations of the ESP material in the Saudi EFL context.
- To offer suggestions for improving the existing teaching material in the dental department and make it more consistent with the dental students' ESP needs.

1.2 Research Questions

This small-scale qualitative case study aims to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the dental students' perceptions of the ESP course material that is being taught in the Saudi EFL context?
2. To what extent do the dental students consider the ESP teaching material appropriate for developing their field-related language proficiency?
3. How can the existing ESP course material be improved to meet the ESP needs of the dental students in the Saudi EFL context?

1.3 Context of the Study

Saudi Arabia is one of the largest countries in the Gulf region where EFL has been taught at the tertiary level. As Saudi Arabia hosts the most expatriates than any other gulf state, its society is more culturally diverse. Therefore, the hospitals have doctors, nurses, technicians, managers from various countries who use English as a means of communication. According to the Ministry of Health (MOH), only 27.6% of the dentists are Saudi nationals in Saudi hospitals, which shows that local dentists will have to interact with foreign counterparts in English language and thus need to develop their communicative competence and enhance their intelligibility and comprehensibility in an EFL setting. In the department of dentistry in a Saudi Arabian university where the current study was conducted, the purpose of ESP learning of dentist students is purely instrumental, so that they develop their communicative repertoire and utilize it in various cultural settings.

2.0 Literature Review

The ESP programs started in the mid-20th century as an expansion of technical, economic and scientific activities at different parts of the world (Dudley-Evans, St John, & Saint John, 1998). This new initiative in the field of English language teaching aimed to address the language learning needs and demands of the non-English speaking students to develop their communication skills. As a result of this new branch of the English Language Teaching (ELT), the course designers, material developers and instructors were pressured to meet the requirements of the learners, employers, and language schools in their respective contexts. This

section of the paper underpins the theoretical foundations of ESP material designed for medical students in dental departments to understand its use and effectiveness in relation to the dental students' language proficiency in various contexts around the world.

2.1 The Meaning of ESP

The fundamental objective of English language teaching is to enable language learners to use English for different purposes in various social and professional contexts. According to Candlin, Kirkwood, and Moore (1978), ESP has stemmed from the field of ELT, which has a significant impact on course design and syllabus, and material development. The key benefit of ESP is to tailor language material in a particular context to meet the context-specific requirements of ESP adult learners and enable them to communicate in their career fields. In Mackay and Mountford (1978) view: "ESP is generally used to refer to the teaching of English for a clearly utilitarian purpose" (p. 2). They contend that ESP textbook should serve the purpose of improving learners' English proficiency, particularly related to their field of specialization. Similarly, Robinson (1991) explains that: "Students study English not because they are interested in the English Language or English culture as such but because they need English for study or work purposes" (p. 2). In light of Robinson's (1991) argument, the ESP course material should develop learners' proficiency so that they can operate in their work. This idea has been further elaborated by Basturkmen (2014), who states that: "In ESP, language is learnt not for its own sake or for the sake of gaining a general education, but to smooth the path to entry or greater linguistic efficiency in academic, professional or workplace environments" (p. 18). Basturkmen's (2014) definition helps in understanding the meaning of ESP, which is mainly about developing linguistic competence that is required to function in a particular profession, discipline or professional field.

2.2 English for Medical Students

English has become the language of scientific research and publications around the world. In the field of medicine, the researchers, experts and scientists publish their findings in English, which has forced the curriculum designers to make the English language as a significant component of the EFL curriculum at the professional level. In this respect, Ammon and Hellinger (2013) state that:

"English has become so dominant as the international language of science, especially of scientific publications, that its use seems to be necessary if one wants to be read or discussed outside of one's own country" (p. 8).

Moreover, Webber (1993) states that: "It is well known that 90% of scientific articles are published in English because they have a higher probability of being read and cited" (quotes in Piqué & Viera, 1997, p. 98). As English has been the language of scientific research, students of medical science need to develop concepts and knowledge related to medicine by watching lectures, talks, dialogues, videos and reading an extensive source of scholarly articles published in peer-reviewed journals. As a branch of medical sciences, dental students also require developing their English proficiency to read scholarly articles and communicate with people from different social, cultural, linguistic, academic and professional backgrounds.

2.3 The Basics of an ESP Course

The communicative needs of medical students are an essential consideration of an ESP course. However, before designing a course, it is equally important to consider their learning needs and targets. Target needs refer to what the learners require to learn and be able to do at the end of an ESP course. To put it more simply, the learners' needs "are perhaps more appropriately described as "objectives." (Berwick & Johnson, 1989 as cited in Robinson, 1991, p. 7). According to Robinson (1991), the learning needs are: "what the learner needs to do to actually acquire the language" (Robinson, 1991, p. 7).

When the target is set, the course designers can think of the ESP learners' necessities, lacks and wants to solidify the syllabus and its objectives.

2.3.1 Necessities

They refer to what the ESP students have to know about the language and target situation so they can effectively communicate and function in that particular situation.

2.3.2 Lacks

Lacks involve the learners' lack of knowledge of the English language. The learners consider a gap between what they already know and what they need to know in order to develop their language proficiency. The ESP course bridges this gap and the learners can develop the missing knowledge by the end of the course.

2.3.3 Wants

They refer to what the ESP learners want to achieve from the course that is mainly related to their personally identified needs. These needs could be job-specific, or a field related which the course designers will have to consider.

2.4 The Use of L1 in Dental EFL Classrooms

In the field of ELT, the research presents two different viewpoints on the use of students' first language (L1) in EFL classrooms. It's a tool to facilitate the teaching and learning process and to swiftly achieve the lesson objectives. Some scholars believe that it becomes inevitable to teach without using students' L1 for translating and explaining particular words, terminologies and concepts as instruction in L1 can have a positive influence on the learners' comprehension of the target language (Basturkmen, 2014; Bonyadi, 2003; Harmer, 2007; Juárez & Oxbrow, 2008; Latsanyphone & Bouangeune, 2009).

On the contrary, research shows that the use of L1 in an EFL classroom is the result of failure to understand the target language. The teachers and learners often code-switch to the learners' L1 when they encounter a communication barrier. Nevertheless, the increasing use of L1 will reduce the amount of linguistic input the learners receive through classroom instruction. As a result, their communicative competence will be affected. Therefore, to achieve greater language proficiency the teachers should avoid the use of L1 in EFL classrooms (De la Campa & Nassaji, 2009; Spada & Lightbown, 1999; Swain & Lapkin, 2000; Turnbull, 2001; Turnbull & Arnett, 2002).

It is worth noting that there is no empirical evidence to prove the use of L1 a beneficial or detrimental practice for dental EFL students. It would be interesting to know whether the dental students in Saudi EFL context consider it a useful tool that helps them communicate effectively.

2.5 Teaching Activities in Specialist Vocabulary Development

The nature and range of teaching activities used by the teachers to develop learners' vocabulary play a vital role in the process of learning a foreign language. In the ESP domain, it is crucial as the students would be using those newly acquired words, phrases, and expressions for specific purposes in their professional contexts. Teaching medical vocabulary might prove to be a challenging task for ESP teachers, particularly in the dentistry department, where the language use is more specific to the learners' professional language use. Therefore, teachers would need to be very innovative to design and plan activities that are based on the ESP learners' needs, lacks and wants. Developing the students' interest and familiarity would be the key targets of the ESP teachers to introduce vocabulary that is needed for comprehension as well as for production.

For learners to improve their communicative competence, teachers can adopt various methods, such as associating words pictures/diagrams with their correct pronunciation or spelling of the English words (Thornbury, 2005). Similarly, to make learning a sustainable experience, the words could be taught cognitively so that they can become part of the learners' permanent memory (Miller, 2009). The same technique could be applied by ESP teachers teaching medical vocabulary to develop learners' vocabulary; however, more empirical investigation is required to understand the needs, lacks and wants of the students who study ESP in dentistry departments at the tertiary level.

2.6 Learners' Attitude Towards ESP Learning

Learners' attitude towards learning a target language plays a vital role in the success of pedagogical practices. There is an abundance of literature that shows that EFL learners' lack of motivation and interest in English learning classes hinder the process of teaching and learning (Shah, Hussain, & Nasseef, 2013). Since dentists and other medical students need to communicate effectively in their professional fields, the learners must develop a positive attitude to English courses that are taught in the dentistry departments.

Studies indicate that the learners' lack of interest in learning English is due to cultural differences between the content material and the learners' culture (Brown, 2004; Cutrone, 2009; Doyon, 2000; Johnson, 2009; Sullivan & Schatz, 2009). It is essential that the course designers consider cultural differences and learners' preferences with regards to ESP materials, specifically, for future dentists who will be using the English language in a variety of situations.

2.7 Significance of Writing Skills for ESP Dentistry Students

The importance of writing skills for dentistry students is widely acknowledged because scientific and medical research is written and understood in English language and ESP learners will have to read and keep themselves abreast of new ideas. Nguyen (2016) is of the view that:

In the medical community is the dental community in which dental students, research dentists, practicing dentists, and dental faculty in dental schools write and publish their research. All groups of the dental community face challenges and receive benefits when

they write and publish their own research; however, each group is influenced by their writing experiences in different ways (p. 34).

As the significant role of writing in the field of dentistry is acknowledged, it is vital to give students adequate training and exposure to reading and writing on scientific research in dentistry and enable them to be proficient professionals. Since there is a shortage of literature on this issue in the Saudi EFL context, the learners' writing needs and lacks need to be investigated to make the current course up to the international standards.

2.7.1 The role of the ESP Textbook

The vital role of ESP textbook has been discussed in the literature. There is no doubt that in EFL contexts, the use of English is restricted to classrooms, therefore, the textbook material should suffice to the needs of the learners in and outside the classroom (Dudley-Evans et al., 1998; Riazi, 2003). According to Li and Huo (2014), it is fundamental to design an effective and a practical syllabus, content material for effective teaching and evaluation of ESP courses. The coursebook for dental ESP students should include activities that would bring variety to classroom teaching and learning. De Jong (2016) has identified the following activities which would benefit the ESP medical students:

- Reading texts in groups,
- Finding specific information related to the content,
- Group work for problem solving,
- Workshops, and
- Teacher's explanations of grammatical contents (when needed). (De Jong, 2016, p. 256).

It would be interesting to explore the various textbooks that are being used in the Saudi Arabian universities for improving the communicative skills of the ESP students in medical fields. As textbook is the only available source for teachers and learners, it is important to understand its relevance and effectiveness in the process of dental ESP students' communicative abilities in the Saudi EFL context.

2.7.2 The Evaluation of the ESP courses

Since the primary goal of the ESP courses is to improve the learners' communicative skills for professional purposes, therefore, the process of evaluation is important to assess the quality and effectiveness of the courses. According to Lesiak-Bielawska (2014) explains that: "It not only requires assessing learners' knowledge and skills at the end of the course..., but also evaluation of the acquired skills in the light of the post-course vocational and academic experiences of the learners" (p. 24). To make it more explicit, the evaluation process encompasses both ESP students and the textbook/syllabus to assess the learning outcomes and link them to the future goals of students' and organizations. Lesiak-Bielawska (2014) considers the process of summative and formative assessment as part of the overall assessment and course syllabus may not achieve its expected outcomes unless we apply a rigorous means of evaluation. In the EFL context of Saudi Arabia, it is certainly a novel idea to evaluate the ESP course of dentistry students as empirical evidence does not support the practice in this part of the world.

3.0 Methodology

This study has adopted a case study approach to look into the perceptions of ESP students at a dental department of a Saudi Arabian university and understand the nature of ESP material and its impact on their English proficiency. The case study approach suited the nature of the current study as a case study is: “an empirical enquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context ...where multiple sources of evidence are used” (Yin, 2017, p. 13). Similarly, according to Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2013):

A case study provides a unique example of real people in real situations, enabling readers to understand ideas more clearly than simply by presenting them with abstract theories or principles. ...contexts are unique and dynamic; hence case studies investigate and report the real life, complex dynamic and unfolding interactions of events, human relationships and other factors in a unique instance. (p. 289)

Since the focus of this study is on one particular context, one group of ESP students in a dentistry department, the case study will provide insights into the learners' understanding of the research phenomenon.

3.1 Participants

The participants of this small-scale case study are 12 ESP students in the dentistry department of a Saudi university who study ESP course over the course of a semester to meet the English proficiency requirement of the institute. The students are all Saudi nationals who speak Arabic as their L1 and have studied for one full year in the preparatory year program at the university before enrolling in the dentistry department.

The purposive sampling strategy was used to employ the participants for this study. Purposive sampling allows the researchers to choose the participants who are in the best position to share their knowledge and experience related to the research phenomenon (Cohen et al., 2013). Before the start of the data collection process of the study, the participants' consent was sought, and they were formally informed about the goals and objectives of the study. They were also informed about their right to withdraw from the study. Their confidentiality was ensured by assigning them pseudonyms, which have been used throughout the findings of this paper.

3.2 Research Methods

This case study has utilized qualitative data techniques to elicit and interpret the ESP learners' experiences and observation of the ESP material and its impact on their English language proficiency. Qualitative data collection tools equip a researcher to examine “how human beings construct and give meaning to their actions in concrete social situations” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 204). Besides, these data collection tools focus on the participants' understanding of the meaning that they give to the events (Patton, 1990). The current study will use semi-structured interviews with 12 ESP students in the dentistry department of a Saudi Arabian university. The use of semi-structured interviews allows researchers to look into the research phenomenon from the participants' perspectives and gain an in-depth understanding of it. Due to its flexibility, semi-

structured interviews gave the participants a chance to express their views without any influence of the researcher. The participants shared their opinions about the use of ESP material. The key themes of the interviews were derived from the literature as well as my personal experience of the research phenomenon.

3.3 Data Analysis

The semi-structured interviews were transcribed and thematically analyzed. Saldaña (2015) model of step by step qualitative data analysis was applied to develop codes, categories and themes; however, NVivo 10[®] software was used for this purpose. The initial process of data analysis involved coding of the whole data which led to 150 open codes. Then the identical codes were put together and merged to reduce the number of categories to 70. In the third step, the codes were further brought closer to develop 14 broader categories. The closely linked categories were put against three broad themes. These themes were checked against the research questions to make sure that they are answered, and the key aims of the study are achieved.

4.0 Findings and Discussion

This section of the paper presents the significant findings and discuss them in the light of the reviewed literature. The findings delineate the participants' views in the form of direct quotes. The presented themes are representative of the participants' views which directly answer the three research questions.

1. What are the dental students' perceptions of the ESP course material that is being taught in the Saudi EFL context?
2. To what extent do the dental students consider the ESP teaching material appropriate for developing their field-related language proficiency?
3. How can the existing ESP course material be improved to meet the ESP needs of the dental students in the Saudi EFL context?

4.1 The Inappropriacy of the ESP Contents

The participants' views show that the ESP textbook, its key contents and the topics that are being covered in the dentistry department of the Saudi Arabian university do not meet the English proficiency needs of the dental ESP students. The data explicitly indicate that the learners want topics that are context-specific and reflect the local culture, so they can utilize the acquired communicative competence and enhance their professional effectiveness. The extracts from the interviews by Sarah, Sonia, Manal, and Yoku (pseudonyms) show that the teaching material and the coursebook contents need significant modifications.

I believe what we read and try to learn in the classroom, doesn't give us a chance to make use of outside the classroom. The textbook has topics related to your dentistry field, but I don't think these topics help us develop our speaking skills. (Sarah)

The textbook material is fine for students who study in western countries as the contents are directly borrowed from that context. That's why I think lots of changes need to be made in order to make it context specific. We need to be proficient in our own context. (Sonia)

The teaching techniques, the classroom tasks and the topics in the syllabus are OK but I would love more interactions with my peers. For example, group presentations, pair work etc. can be very useful for our learning. (Manal)

A textbook is a key to develop skills. The range of topics covered in our textbook is wide and really nice, but the textbook seems to be outdated and topics look unfamiliar and irrelevant. Sometimes, it's not easy to link the topics to my personal experience. It often takes me so long to connect myself to the topic of a reading passage. It doesn't help my comprehension. (Yoku)

There is a visible theme in the data that existing contents of the textbook do not meet the learners' needs; however, it is worth noting that the learners are aware of their communicative needs as found by Riazi (2003), and Dudley-Evans et al. (1998). As the participants have voiced their concerns regarding the inappropriacy of the course contents, the findings resonate with what Li and Huo (2014) found out that course material and syllabus need to be up to the learners' expectations. Moreover, the activities and teaching techniques promogulated in the textbook are not of interactive nature and the participants would love to have activities that would involve group work, workshops and problem-solving tasks. The findings are in line with what De Jong (2016) established in her findings.

4.2 Teachers' Teachability and Its Influence on ESP Dental Students' Proficiency

The data indicate that the participants are very pleased with teaching material, teachers' pedagogical techniques and the teachers' linguistic backgrounds. It is evident from the participants' interviews that most of the ESP teachers come from the Arab world and speak Arabic as their mother tongue. Their lack of English proficiency has a direct impact on the learners' motivation and attitude towards ESP material and classroom activities. Moreover, the findings show that ESP teachers often make use of Arabic in the classroom which might have a negative influence on the ESP learners. The teachers' lack of knowledge about the most top-notch pedagogical techniques is another problem that the participants have outlined in this study. The following extracts are representative of what other participants shared in their interviews.

Our teachers are mostly Arabs. They are very experienced though, but I think they should use more modern techniques to teach their ESP students. (Maria)

Nothing can be done about the course syllabus if the teachers are not willing to make the material interesting. I don't find most of the teachers' lessons motivating or interesting because they teach in a very traditional style. (Sana)

I would love to have teachers who don't speak Arabic as their first language and always use English in the classroom. Sometimes, we need to discuss things which are not related to the lesson and we need to use English. It helps our English language fluency if we speak in English. (Maha)

The old and traditional ways of teaching ESP course do not help us learn and improve our English language skills. I think it's all about the teachers to make the lessons enjoyable. (Marina)

As this study confirms that the use of learners' L1 is not encouraged by the participants, the findings are in contradiction to what the literature shows (Bonyadi, 2003; Butzkamm, 2003; Harmer, 2007; Juárez & Oxbrow, 2008; Latsanyphone & Bouangeune, 2009). Nevertheless, the findings of this study are very much in line with previous studies in this area of research (De la Campa & Nassaji, 2009; Krashen & Terrell, 1983; Spada & Lightbown, 1999; Swain & Lapkin, 2000; Turnbull, 2001; Turnbull & Arnett, 2002). In a nutshell, the study suggests that the ESP teachers should avoid the use of L1 in classroom as it might influence the language proficiency of the Saudi dental students in the EFL context.

4.3 Learners' Awareness of Their ESP Needs

The data indicate that the dental ESP learners are highly motivated and have an urge for learning English and developing their communicative skills. The positive learning attitude of the dental ESP students in the Saudi Arabian university is in striking contrast to the studies reviewed on this topic. For example, previous research studies illustrate that the learners in the EFL context usually lack interest and motivation to learn English as a foreign language and therefore, their negative attitude hinders the pedagogical process in EFL contexts (Brown, 2004; Doyon, 2000; Johnson, 2009; Shah et al., 2013; Sullivan & Schatz, 2009). Nevertheless, this study indicates that the ESP dental students in the Saudi EFL contexts are not only motivated to learn English, but they are very much aware of the learning needs and lacks. The following excerpts show the intrinsic and extrinsic motivation of the participants and their acute awareness of their ESP needs.

I know it's not an ideal context as we have to study other subjects, but English is very important as we have to read scholarly articles in English to keep our knowledge of the field up to date. (Rana)

It's not only for the job purposes that I want to improve my English. In fact, I want to continue my studies and intend to go abroad for further studies. Therefore, I need to work on four skills. I would love to face intellectual challenges in my ESP course, so I can improve myself and score well on proficiency tests. (Sana)

We often discuss with each other in classrooms. Our main problem is that we don't ever use English outside the classroom. So, it's not going to be easy to speak English correctly. But if we can create an environment in the classroom where all four skills are practiced together along with our knowledge about dentistry, that will really help us a lot. (Mano)

The findings also show that the participants consider reading and writing as essential skills as they would require read scientific research and write scholarly articles in the field of dentistry. Of course, without being able to read research papers, they would not be able to write and publish empirical research in journals. The findings are similar to what Nguyen (2016) and confirm the fact that writing skills are crucial for ESP students of dentistry even in the Saudi EFL context. The excerpts below are indicative of what other participants expressed.

The dentistry books are in English. In fact, the articles, research papers, commentary and blogs, everything is in English that we must read to pass the exams or upgrade our knowledge. So, we should have good reading skills. If we get a chance to learn the reading comprehension

techniques in our ESP class, that will be something huge. We can use the same techniques in our general reading. (Sonia)

I dream to be a published author. I really want to write and publish in peer-reviewed journals in the field of dentistry. I wish our ESP course focuses more on writing skills and prepares us for professional writing in the field of dentistry. That will give us a chance to share our knowledge and research with other dentists in the field. (Sarah)

This is an interesting finding that learners are aware of their reading and writing needs and they can link this necessity to their future goals and aspirations. Therefore, the coursebook material and teaching methodologies should focus on the learners' lacks, wants and necessities that are based on a strong evidence in the form of needs analysis.

4.4 Implications of the Findings

The qualitative findings of this small-scale study have implications for the ESP courses that are being taught in the dental departments of higher education institutes of Saudi Arabia. The data show that coursebook contents, topics, learning tasks and skill-based activities do not reflect the learners' needs and learners often feel disconnected to the topics. Therefore, the course designers should take into account the ESP dental students' interests and background knowledge of the teaching contents to make it a learners' interest-based course that will benefit the ESP students. The findings also show that learners' have a very positive attitude towards learning of English language and they are aware of their contextual constraints; therefore, it is significant to consider their 'wants' while designing an ESP course for dental students which would ideally encompass all four skills and concentrate on their development of reading and writing skills along with listening and speaking skills. Last but not least, learners demand for competent teachers who are proficient in English language and who would not use the learners' L1 in classroom. Such teachers would be a source of inspiration and motivation for dental ESP learners in the Saudi EFL context. Since students have a preference for such dynamic and professionally rich ESP teachers, the recruitment teams should consider the learners' preferences while employing teachers in the dentistry department of higher education institutions in Saudi Arabia.

5.0 Conclusion

The small-scale qualitatively driven case study has aimed to explore the dental ESP students' perceptions of the ESP material and its influence on their English proficiency. The study has adopted a qualitative technique of semi-structured interviews to elicit the views of 12 purposively chosen participants. The key findings have indicated that the ESP learners in the dentistry department have a very positive attitude towards learning English language in general and ESP in particular. Their awareness of their linguistic needs makes it a significant study in the field of ESP in Saudi Arabia. The findings also suggest that the coursebook contents and material are not up to the mark and the participants have voiced their concerns about outdated, inappropriate and remote topics which are often not in line with the ESP learners' interest and needs. The findings illustrate that the ESP teachers should use English in ESP classes and introduce learner centered interactive activities that would encourage the students to be more involved in classroom activities. In short, the existing ESP courses in the dental department needs to be revised to make them in line with the learners' needs and international standards.

6.0 Future Research

This study has a qualitatively driven case study approach to explore the dental ESP students' perceptions of the ESP material and its influence on their English proficiency. The future research can consider different data collection tools, such as a survey questionnaire and open-ended questionnaires to reach out a wide range of ESP students in the dentistry departments of the Saudi universities to grasp a fuller understanding of the research phenomenon. Moreover, the coursebooks, syllabuses and curriculums need to be evaluated and their appropriacy in light of the modern ESP practices should be taken into account in order to take the existing courses to the next level and meet the international standards. This exercise will certainly require a rigorous research process; therefore, the researchers can consider the task as an important milestone in a bid to evaluate the existing courses and recommend changes to the Ministry of Health and Ministry of Higher Education in Saudi Arabia.

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