

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

English is today, one of the most important languages in the world, and it is the language of choice for professionals, academics and world-class medical institutions world-wide. As such, it is very important for speakers of almost all languages to possess a good working knowledge of English, due to the fact that it serves as a medium for communication not only with English native speakers, but also the global community.

1.1 Background of the Study

The Thai government has placed great importance on the country's development towards becoming a major health care hub. Thus a good working knowledge of English is proving to be essential for healthcare professionals. With numerous new drugs, treatments and diseases being discovered and registered throughout the world, in order to increase knowledge about new medicine and to maintain world-class standards, medical technologists and healthcare professionals must be able to understand textbooks and research papers from throughout the world. As a result, a good level of English fluency is therefore essential.

In health science, English is an important medium for effective global communication as most medical books, research documents, and journals are written in English. Indeed, more than 65% of all international journals in mathematics,

physics, chemistry, biology, and medicine are in English (Suwanroporn, 1998). It is a fact that very few previous and current journals have been published in the Thai language, and thus it is very important that medical students are able to comprehend material in English.

Medical technologists (also known as 'Clinical Laboratory Scientists' or 'Biomedical Scientists') perform, control, and supervise all levels of clinical laboratory testing in hospitals and clinical laboratories (Advance medical technology association, 2009). To keep up with the development of new medical technologies which involves new trends in treatment and medicine, a sound command of the English language is essential to allow medical technologists to follow recent developments. It is regrettable that there is no specific English course available in Thailand for medical technologists. Additionally, there are few studies conducted in English which permit effective problem solving exercises for medical technologists.

Medical technologists in Thailand currently study the same general (shared) English curriculum that exists between nurses, doctors and also dentists. Whilst the majority of the medical terminology is indeed shared between these professionals, courses fail to address the unique needs of medical technologists.

The teaching of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) focuses on learners and their specific purposes. The key difference, however, between ESP and traditional English teaching is that ESP focuses on the distinctive needs of learners. English for Specific Purposes implies a special objective, which is usually to teach the skills needed to meet the occupational and professional requirements of the learner.

Most ESP programs are concerned with teaching English to students whose primary interest lies in some general branch of science, medicine, commerce or technology. The categories of needs of the students may be academic and English is therefore an essential requirement for further study, e.g. medical students requiring English in order to read medical textbooks in English and to secure gainful employment (Mackay & Mountford. 1978).

Thailand is rapidly growing as a healthcare hub both for the rest of Asia and throughout the world. Due to increasing costs of healthcare abroad, more and more foreigners are coming to Thailand as many private of hospitals offer world-class healthcare at reasonable at reasonable prices. Whilst the role of a medical technologist might be largely behind the scenes, the needs of English competency are indeed increasing due to increased medical tourism, adherence to international standards, new medical tests and drug treatments.

Medical professionals around the world have had difficulties in using English in their career. Medical technologists are among those professionals. The difficulties lie in different language skills at different levels. In particular, there are only a few studies of their needs and problems in particular; none has been conducted in Thailand where the number of medical treatments in private hospitals has been increasing.

1.2 The Purposes of the Study

1.2.1 To identify the needs and problems of English for medical technologists.

1.2.2 To assess the needs of English and preferences for an English for Medical Technologists (EMP) training course.

1.3 Research Questions

1.3.1 What are the problems faced by medical technologists in using English

1.3.2 To what extent do medical technologists need English for their work?

1.4 Significance of the Study

This study focuses on the importance of English for medical technologists working in hospitals. The researcher specifically studies the needs and problems of medical technologists in the Pattaya area where the researcher is working. Because these hospitals have so many international patients, working as medical technologists at these hospitals are among the most appropriate persons to comment on the practical use of English in their professions. The significances of the study are as follows:

1.4.1 The information obtained from such an investigation would be beneficial to the Department of English in the university. It would not only help in course evaluation, but also in the preparation of a specific English proficiency improvement program for post graduate medical technologists in the future.

1.4.2 The information about the problems and needs of these Thai medical technologists would help course designers to develop a curriculum which will meet the specific needs of medical technologists in a particular group.

1.4.3 The result of this study can be designed to help medical technologists acquire the type of language which is relevant to real needs in their work especially for those who may work in our larger cities.

1.5 Scope and Limitations of the Study

1.5.1 The most significance of which is the use of a relatively small sample. Small samples are not as generalizable as larger samples and it is possible that a larger sample might have produced different results. The sample is also skewed toward women and younger individuals, which may have affected the findings. The findings, therefore, may not apply to all the hospital medical technologists in Thailand. The data obtained was analysed and used as a guideline for improving the English skills and developing courses relevant to the needs of these medical technologists.

1.5.2 There may have been some degree of selection bias, given that all participants were by necessity volunteers, and those who volunteered to participate in this research may have differed in some way from those who would not have chosen to take part.

1.5.3 Another limitation of this research is its reliance on self-report measures. Study participants may not have provided accurate answers in some cases due to faulty memories or other issues. Also, the measurement instrument used for this study asked participants to estimate the importance of each of the key English language skills and how often particular language deficits create problems in various workplace situations. Asking for estimates probably introduced some degree of subjectivity; participants may have differed in their perceptions regarding the importance of particular English language skills to their profession or the frequency with which each skill presents difficulties in their day-to-day work.

1.5.4 This research is provided only a general overview of the English language challenges faced by Thai medical technologists. Although it identified situations in which particular skill deficits create problems, it did not provide insight into what aspects of those situations are problematic.

1.6 Definitions of Key Terms

1.6.1 **“Problems”** refers to challenging situations faced by medical technologists when using English.

1.6.2 **“Needs”** refers to the English language requirements of the tasks that medical technologists have to perform in the occupational situation.

1.6.3 **“Need analysis”** refers to the activities that are involved in collecting information that will serve as the basis for developing a curriculum that will meet the needs of a particular group of medical technologists.

1.6.4 **“English”** refers to the five skills: listening, reading, writing, speaking and translating.

1.6.6 **“Medical technologists”** refers to those who received a B.Sc. in Medical Technology with a license to practice. In this study “medical technologists” refers to full-time medical technologists who work at Pattaya International Hospital, Pattaya Memorial Hospital Bangkok Pattaya Hospital and Banglamung Hospital.

1.6.7 **“Hospital”** refers to the private place providing medical treatments as well as psychiatric care for sick and injured residents and tourists to the Pattaya area only.

1.7 Summary of the Chapter

In conclusion, this chapter has presented the background of the study. These contribute to the purposes and the research questions of this study in the development of ESP Self-Learning Package for Medical technologists. The present study also provides the scope and limitations of the study, as well as definitions of key terms used which provides in the final part of the chapter. In the next chapter, Chapter Two is presented the review of the related literature.

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