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Motivation for Learning English and Preparedness for Professional Communication: A Study Based on Medical Students' Self-Assessment

English proficiency is essential for medical students, enabling them to collaborate internationally and provide quality patient care. Although Kazakh and Russian are the primary languages of instruction at medical universities in Kazakhstan, the demand for enhanced English language training is growing. However, there is a gap in the literature regarding the motivations and needs of Kazakhstani medical students in learning English. This study examines three areas: (a) the motivations behind students' English learning, (b) their readiness for professional communication after at least one semester of university-level English, and (c) their desired course content improvements. An anonymous survey was conducted with 95 medical students at Al-Farabi KazNU, all of whom had completed at least one semester of English. The results showed stronger intrinsic motivation than extrinsic motivation among the participants. The study also found a confidence gap between general English proficiency and English for medical purposes, with students reporting lower confidence in the latter. Although students were generally satisfied with the English course, a significant number expressed a desire for a greater focus on medical terminology and practical skills, such as doctor-patient communication. The study's limitations include being conducted at a single university and relying on self-assessment by students.

Keywords: English for general purposes, English for medical purposes, medical students, student self-assessment, professional communication, intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, course content improvements.

Introduction

In today's globalized world, medical education increasingly transcends national borders, necessitating the training of doctors who are capable of working across diverse cultures and regions [1]. English, recognized as a global lingua franca, plays a crucial role in this international context, serving as the primary medium for scientific communication and cross-cultural interaction [2]. In Kazakhstan, the university-level English course aims to develop students' intercultural-communicative competence, targeting proficiency levels aligned with the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR), ranging from A2 to B1, and potentially reaching B2 depending on the students' initial proficiency [3].

Despite Kazakh and Russian being the primary languages of instruction in Kazakhstani medical universities, there is a growing emphasis on the importance of English language education. Recent policy changes, such as the Order of the Minister of Science and Higher Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan dated 20 July 2022 No. 2 and the Order of the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Kazakhstan dated 4 July 2022 No. KR DSM – 63, have allowed university instructors greater flexibility to adapt courses such as “Foreign Language”, “Russian Language”, “Information and Communication Technologies”, and “Physical Education” to better align with their programs' needs [4-5]. This shift highlights the necessity of assessing medical students' motivation and needs regarding English language learning.

Motivation is a well-researched factor in general education, significantly influencing learning behaviour and outcomes [6]. According to Oroujlou and Vahedi (2011), successful language acquisition is directly linked to students' motivation, which can be defined as “a person's intrinsic goals and desires” [7]. Williams and Burden (1997) suggest that learning is most likely to occur when we want to learn, emphasizing the powerful influence of motivation. They categorize motivation into two types: intrinsic, driven by personal interest, curiosity, or desire to succeed, and extrinsic, influenced by external factors such as parents, teachers, or exams [8]. The complexity of motivation has led researchers within the Self-Determination Theory (SDT) framework to explore how different types of motivation affect human behaviour and well-being. Ryan and Deci (2000), key developers of SDT, describe intrinsic motivation (IM) as engaging in an activity for its inherent satisfaction, such as fun or challenge, rather than for external rewards [9]. Conversely, extrinsic moti-

vation (EM) involves performing an activity to achieve a separable outcome, such as avoiding parental disapproval or meeting curriculum requirements. Researchers also distinguish between autonomous and controlled motivation [10-11]. Autonomous motivation is stronger because it comes from within and does not depend on external rewards, while controlled motivation relies on external factors and can diminish without them.

Understanding the balance between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation in learners is crucial [12]. Nguyen and Habok (2021) reviewed 10 studies on students' motivation for learning English in various countries, including Taiwan, Indonesia, China, Yemen, and Vietnam [11]. Recent studies, such as one in Indonesia, found high levels of intrinsic motivation among Gayonese students learning English [13]. In Iran, research on engineering students' motivation in ESP courses revealed that practical applications and long-term goals motivated students more than compulsory requirements, though negative attitudes toward certain aspects of ESP courses and varying motivation by academic level highlighted the need for course modifications [14]. On the other hand, research in China by Y. Meng (2022) focused on demotivating factors in English learning, finding that low satisfaction with teachers' preparation, content, and learning environment were significant factors. Meng concluded that improving motivation requires a more reasonable curriculum and better selection and training of foreign language teachers [15].

Davies and Pearse (2000) argue that even the most carefully designed lesson plans and activities will only motivate students if they align with their interests, needs, and aspirations. They emphasize the importance of consulting students about the topics and activities they find engaging [16]. Chinese researchers also recognize the need to analyze students' target situations and learning needs [17]. Targeting refers to understanding specific situations where students will use English, while learning needs involve the specific language, such as vocabulary or phrases, necessary for achieving communication goals. Needs analysis is often considered a crucial starting point for course design [1, 2, 14, 16, 17]. There are diverse learners, including those who need English for study or work, those who are reluctant but recognize their future language needs, and those for whom English learning is mandated by the curriculum. According to Harding (2007), the rationale behind teaching English for Specific Purposes (ESP) is that general English is widely taught from an early age. He argues that regardless of students' proficiency in general English, there is a tendency to seek practical applications for their language skills.

The formation of a professional communication competence is a vital part of any professional education. Yu. Tokmakova (2021) defines "professional foreign language communicative competence" as an integrative quality of personality that enables students to effectively use a foreign language in their future professional sphere [18]. This includes the ability and readiness to use a foreign language for communication, learning new information, and solving professional problems. Tweedie and Johnson (2019) emphasize the growing importance of Medical English as a Lingua Franca (MELF) in healthcare, noting its key role in enabling communication among healthcare professionals and patients from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds [19]. P.K. Elubaeva distinguishes foreign language communicative subcompetence within intercultural-communicative competence as knowledge of special professional terminology in a foreign language and the ability to use it freely in situations of professional communication. The author also identifies professional-communicative subcompetence as a set of competencies aimed at creating one's own polemical and argumentative discourses in professionally modelled communication situations [20].

Despite numerous studies on the motivation of non-English-major students, there is a lack of research specifically focusing on the English-learning motivation and needs of medical students in Kazakhstan. This study aims to address this gap by exploring the following research questions (RQs): RQ 1: What type of motivation drives Kazakhstani medical students in learning English? RQ 2: To what extent do medical students feel prepared for professional communication in English after at least one semester of university-level English courses? RQ 3: What improvements do medical students seek in the content of the university-level English course?

Methods and materials

Data Collection: Data for this study were collected through an online self-administered questionnaire using Google Forms. The survey was conducted in both Kazakh and Russian to accommodate participants' language preferences. The questionnaire consisted of 11 items, including demographic questions. The survey was conducted from May 20 to May 31, 2024.

Participants: The sample was selected using a convenience sampling method, targeting medical students from various educational programs at the Faculty of Medicine at Al-Farabi KazNU, all of whom had

completed at least one semester of university-level English. Initially, 98 students participated in the survey. However, three participants were excluded due to disclosing personal information, and one master's student was excluded as they were beyond the scope of our research. As a result, 95 students were included in the final analysis.

Survey Structure: The survey gathered demographic data such as age, gender, academic year, major, and language of instruction. It assessed students' intrinsic and extrinsic motivation with eight statements adapted from Nguyen and Habok's (2021) study, with responses rated on a five-point scale. Students' English proficiency was measured with 10 statements developed after reviewing the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (2020) and the "Model Curriculum of General Education Discipline 'Foreign Language'" [3, 21]. We provided a list of course improvement suggestions, such as adding medical terminology or using role-playing, and asked students to select their preferences. Additionally, students identified the challenges they face in learning English, providing valuable insights into their specific needs and areas for growth.

Data Analysis: Data from the questionnaire were analyzed to identify trends and correlations between students' motivations, language proficiency, challenges faced, and preferences for course content and independent work activities. The survey responses were collected using Google Forms and subsequently exported to Microsoft Excel for further analysis. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, were used to analyze the data.

Results and Discussion

The results of the study are based on the responses of 95 medical students from the Faculty of Medicine at Al-Farabi KazNU, all of whom had completed at least one semester of university-level English. The demographic details of the respondents are provided in Table 1.

Table 1

Profiles of the respondents (students)

Variables	Type	n	% (n = 95)
Age (years)	16-17	2	2,11 %
	18-20	61	64,21 %
	21-25	29	30,53 %
	26 and older	3	3,16 %
Gender	Male	30	31,58 %
	Female	65	68,42 %
Academic year	First year	69	72,63 %
	Second year	24	25,26 %
	Third year	2	2,11 %
Major	Medicine	5	5,26 %
	General Medicine	55	57,89 %
	Dentistry	13	13,68 %
	Pharmacology	22	23,16 %
Language of instruction	Kazakh	85	89,47 %
	Russian	10	10,53 %

Most respondents (64.21 %) were aged 18-20, with a smaller percentage aged 21-25 (30.53 %). The majority were female (68.42 %), while 31.58 % were male. Most participants were first-year students

(72.63 %), followed by second-year students (25.26 %). General Medicine was the most common major (57.89 %), followed by Pharmacology (23.16 %), Dentistry (13.68 %), and Medicine (5.26 %). Nearly all students (89.47 %) studied in Kazakh, while 10.53 % used Russian as the language of instruction.

RQ1: What type of motivation drives Kazakhstani medical students in learning English? To answer this research question, we assessed students' intrinsic and extrinsic motivation using eight statements, with statements 1–4 representing intrinsic motivation and statements 5–8 representing extrinsic motivation. The statements were adapted from Nguen and Habok's (2021) study on Vietnamese non-English-major students' motivation, ensuring the relevance and reliability of the assessment [11]. Students rated their responses on a five-point Likert scale, where 1 meant "strongly disagree" and 5 meant "strongly agree." The results are shown in Table 2.

Table 2

Descriptive statistics on medical students' motivation to learn English (n = 95)

TM	Statements	M	Sd	<u>SD (%)</u>	<u>D (%)</u>	<u>N (%)</u>	<u>A (%)</u>	<u>SA (%)</u>
IM	<i>I learn English because I find it very interesting.</i>	3,46	1,54	18 (18,95)	11 (11,58)	10 (10,53)	21 (22,11)	35 (36,84)
	<i>I learn English so that I can communicate with people who can speak English.</i>	3,55	1,46	15 (15,79)	10 (10,53)	12 (12,63)	24 (25,26)	34 (35,79)
	<i>I learn English because it will help me to get a good job.</i>	3,59	1,47	14 (14,74)	11 (11,58)	12 (12,63)	21 (22,11)	37 (38,95)
	<i>I learn English because it will help me to be successful in my studies.</i>	3,62	1,49	15 (15,79)	9 (9,47)	12 (12,63)	20 (21,05)	39 (41,05)
EM	<i>I learn English because I want to pass exams.</i>	3,11	1,41	17 (17,89)	17 (17,89)	21 (22,11)	19 (20,00)	21 (22,11)
	<i>I learn English because it is a required course at my university.</i>	2,77	1,42	24 (25,26)	21 (22,11)	18 (18,95)	17 (17,89)	15 (15,79)
	<i>I learn English because I want to be as good at English as someone I know.</i>	3,16	1,50	21 (22,11)	12 (12,63)	18 (18,95)	19 (20,00)	25 (26,32)
	<i>I learn English because I want to please my family.</i>	2,96	1,55	27 (28,42)	13 (13,68)	13 (13,68)	21 (22,11)	21 (22,11)
<p>Note. TM — Type of motivation, IM — Internal motivation, EM — External motivation, M — Mean, Sd — Standard deviation, SD — Strongly disagree, D — Disagree, N — Neutral, A — Agree, SA — Strongly agree.</p>								

The results indicate that Kazakhstani medical students are primarily motivated by intrinsic factors. For example, the highest agreement was observed with the statement "I learn English because it will help me to be successful in my studies" (M = 3.62, SD = 1.49), followed closely by "I learn English because it will help me to get a good job" (M = 3.59, SD = 1.47). These responses suggest that students value English for its potential to enhance their academic and career prospects. In terms of extrinsic motivation, the statement "I learn English because I want to be as good at English as someone I know" received the highest mean (M = 3.16, SD = 1.50), suggesting that comparison to peers is a moderate extrinsic motivator for students. On the other hand, the statement "I learn English because it is a required course at my university" had the lowest mean (M = 2.77, SD = 1.42), indicating that students are not primarily driven by the mandatory nature of the course. These findings highlight that Kazakhstani medical students are predominantly driven by intrinsic motivations, particularly the desire for career success and academic achievement, while extrinsic factors like peer comparison also play a role but to a lesser extent.

RQ2: To what extent do medical students feel ready for professional communication in English after at least one semester of university-level English course? We asked students to rate how ready they felt to use English in general and medical contexts. The survey included 10 statements: 5 focused on general English-speaking skills, and 5 focused on medical English. Each statement addressed a different language skill, such as introducing yourself, asking for directions, and explaining medical procedures. The results are detailed in Table 3.

Table 3

Students' self-assessment of their English-speaking skills in GE and EMP contexts (n = 95)

DA	Statement	M	Sd	No, I can't	Not sure	Yes, I can
GE	<i>I can introduce myself and have basic conversations in English.</i>	2,60	0,71	12 (12,63 %)	14 (14,74 %)	69 (72,63 %)
	<i>I can ask for and give directions in English.</i>	2,42	0,82	20 (21,05 %)	15 (15,79 %)	60 (63,16 %)
	<i>I can describe my daily routine and personal interests in English.</i>	2,36	0,85	23 (24,21 %)	15 (15,79 %)	57 (60,00 %)
	<i>I can order food and drinks in a restaurant in English.</i>	2,28	0,90	28 (29,47 %)	12 (12,63 %)	55 (57,89 %)
	<i>I can participate in social conversations with friends in English.</i>	2,35	0,81	20 (21,05 %)	22 (23,16 %)	53 (55,79 %)
EMP	<i>I can interview and complete the patient's medical history in English.</i>	1,99	0,89	38 (40,00 %)	20 (21,05 %)	37 (38,95 %)
	<i>I can discuss necessary medical procedures with the patient in English.</i>	1,95	0,87	38 (40,00 %)	24 (25,26 %)	33 (34,74 %)
	<i>I can discuss the results of tests and other medical investigations with the patient in English.</i>	1,93	0,88	40 (42,11 %)	22 (23,16 %)	33 (34,74 %)
	<i>I can explain a diagnosis to the patient in English.</i>	1,93	0,90	42 (44,21 %)	18 (18,95 %)	35 (36,84 %)
	<i>I can give instructions/recommendations for the patient's treatment in English.</i>	2,03	0,90	37 (38,95 %)	18 (18,95 %)	40 (42,11 %)
<p><i>Note.</i> DA — Different aspects of English language learning, GE — General English, EMP — English for Medical Purposes, M-Mean, Sd — Standard deviation.</p>						

The results reveal the students' self-assessment of their proficiency in both General English (GE) and English for Medical Purposes (EMP). For General English, students generally felt confident in basic communication skills, with the majority reporting that they could introduce themselves and engage in basic conversations ($M = 2.60$, $SD = 0.71$), ask for directions ($M = 2.42$, $SD = 0.82$), and describe their daily routines ($M = 2.36$, $SD = 0.85$). However, they were less confident in more complex social interactions, such as ordering food ($M = 2.28$, $SD = 0.90$) or participating in social conversations ($M = 2.35$, $SD = 0.81$). Regarding English for Medical Purposes, a significant number of students reported feeling less confident in performing medical tasks in English, such as explaining diagnoses ($M = 1.93$, $SD = 0.90$), discussing test results ($M = 1.93$, $SD = 0.88$), and medical procedures ($M = 1.95$, $SD = 0.87$). Overall, the mean scores for EMP skills were lower than General English skills, indicating a gap in the students' confidence and readiness to use English in medical contexts.

The students were also asked about the most challenging aspects of learning English, with options including grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, listening, reading, speaking, and writing. Figure 1 provides a visual representation of the results.

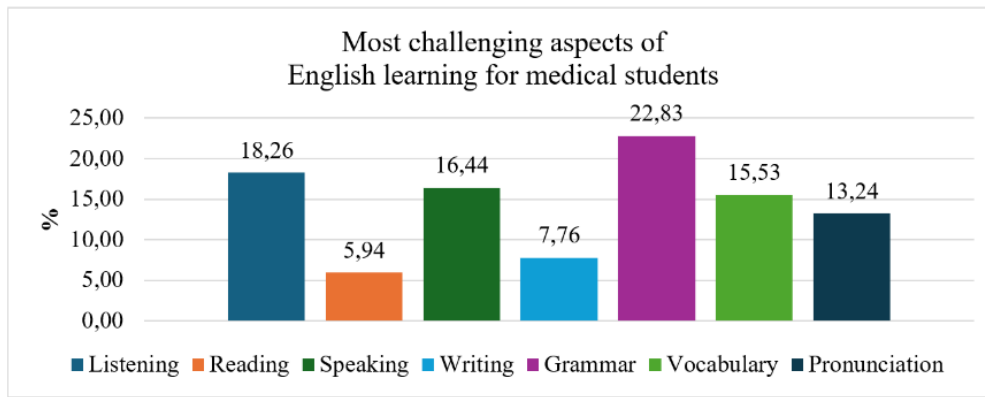


Figure 1. The most difficult parts of learning English for medical students (n = 95)

The results show that grammar(22.83 %) is the most challenging aspect of learning English for medical students, followed by listening(18.26 %) and speaking(16.44 %). Vocabulary(15.5 %) and pronunciation(13.24 %) also pose significant challenges, with a notable number of students reporting difficulty in these areas. Reading(5.94 %) and writing(7.76 %) were identified as less challenging compared to other aspects of the language. These findings highlight the areas that may require more attention in English language instruction for medical students, particularly grammar, listening, and speaking skills. Further analysis is needed to understand the reasons behind these challenges and explore potential solutions.

RQ3: What improvements do medical students seek in the content of the university-level English course? To answer this research question, first, students were asked to rate the quality of their university’s English language programs using a qualitative assessment scale: “Excellent,” “Good,” “Satisfactory,” “Unsatisfactory,” and “Poor.” The results are illustrated in Figure 2.

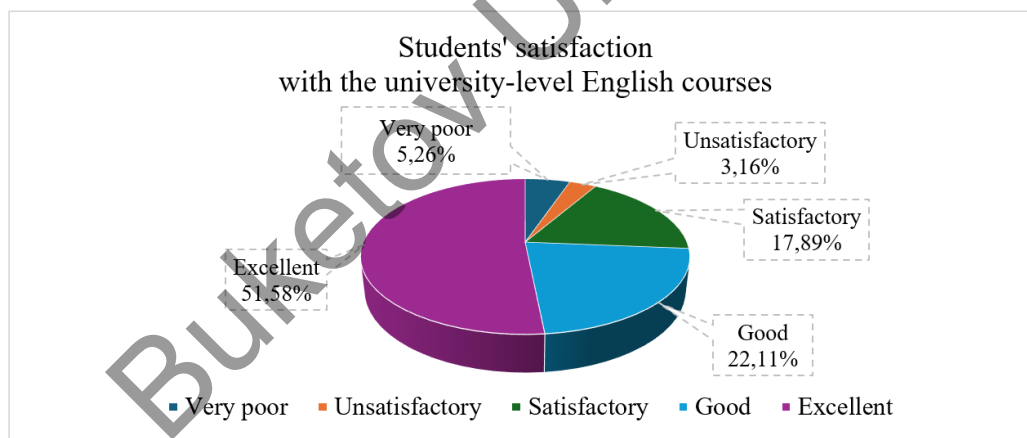


Figure 2. Medical students’ overall satisfaction with the university level English courses (n = 95)

When surveyed about their satisfaction with the university-level English courses, a substantial number of students expressed positive opinions: 49 respondents (51.58 %) rated the course as “Excellent,” and 21 respondents (22.11 %) rated it as “Good.” Only 5.26 % of students considered the program “Very poor,” and 3.16 % rated it “Unsatisfactory.” These results suggest that the overall perception of the English language programs is largely favorable, with room for improvement in areas that were rated less highly. These findings (Figure 2) align with the research conducted by Kuzembayeva and Zhakanova (2021), which found that the majority of first- and second-year students at the West Kazakhstan Marat Ospanov Medical University were also satisfied with their university English course [22].

Subsequently, student-respondents were presented with a list of potential improvements (PI) for the university-level English course, and they selected the changes they felt would be most beneficial. These improvements were designed to better align the course content with medical practice and to address students’

needs for practical language skills, interactive learning, and regular progress assessments. The results are summarized in Figure 3.

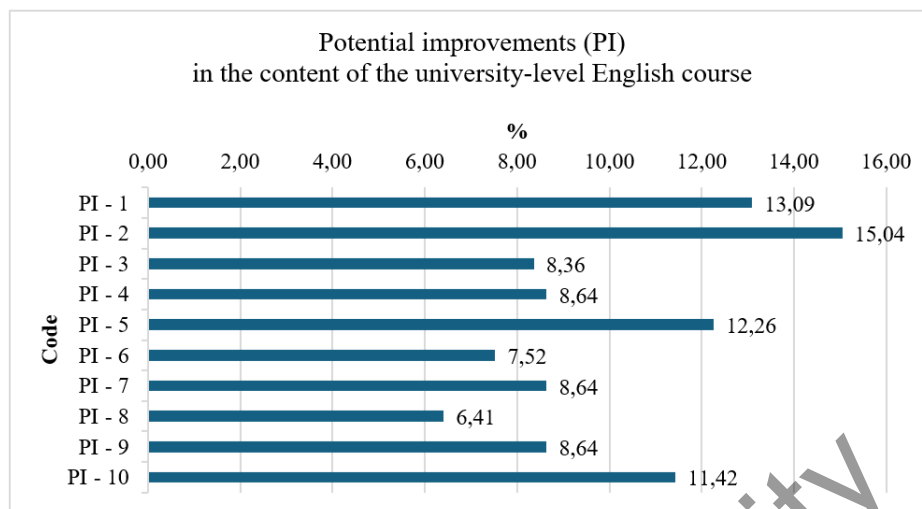


Figure 3. Preferred enhancements to university-level English course content (n = 95)

Consequently, the most popular improvement was devoting more attention to practical language skills, such as patient communication and medical record keeping (PI-2, 15.04 %), followed closely by the incorporation of more medical terminology (PI-1, 13.09 %) and the use of audio and video resources to develop listening and comprehension skills in a medical context (PI-5, 12.26 %). Additionally, students supported incorporating patient cases for reading and collaborative reflection (PI-4, 8.64 %) and using digital platforms for interactive learning (PI-10, 11.42 %). Less popular suggestions included incorporating role-playing, simulations, and practical exercises (PI-3, 8.36 %), regularly surveying students about course content (PI-7, 8.64 %), and supplementing materials with mobile apps (PI-9, 8.64 %). Finally, organizing English-speaking clubs and workshops (PI-6, 7.52 %) and conducting frequent assessments to monitor progress (PI-8, 6.41 %) received the least support, suggesting that students prioritized direct, practical course content over extracurricular or additional assessment-related activities.

Conclusions

This study provides valuable insights into the motivations, readiness for professional communication, and course content preferences of Kazakhstani medical students in their English learning journey. The findings show that intrinsic motivation, especially the desire for career success and academic achievement, is the main driver for students learning English. However, students express less confidence in medical English tasks, such as explaining diagnoses and discussing medical procedures. This highlights the need for more targeted language instruction in medical contexts.

Regarding the course improvements, students particularly want to focus more on practical language skills, medical terminology, and interactive learning methods. This suggests that adding more practical and context-specific training, such as doctor-patient communication and medical record keeping, would help students prepare for their future careers. Using multimedia resources and digital platforms could further support their learning and engagement.

The study emphasizes the importance of adapting English language courses to meet the professional needs of medical students. It also lays the foundation for future research into effective teaching strategies for English for Medical Purposes (EMP) in Kazakhstan and beyond. Future studies could investigate the long-term impact of curriculum changes on students' English skills and readiness for professional practice.

As with any research, this study has certain limitations. First, it was conducted at one university, so the results may not apply to other medical universities in Kazakhstan. Second, the research sample mainly included first- and second-year students. Third, the reliance on student self-assessments of language skills may have introduced bias, as students may overestimate or underestimate their abilities. Future research should include a more diverse sample from multiple universities, academic years, and disciplines. It should also use objective measures of language proficiency alongside self-assessments to improve reliability. Additionally,

exploring the perspectives of students and teachers on in-class activities could offer more insights into effective teaching practices and course design.

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Ағылшын тілін оқуға деген ынталану және кәсіби қарым-қатынасқа дайындық: медик-студенттердің өзін-өзі бағалауына негізделген зерттеу

Медик-студенттер үшін ағылшын тілін білу өте маңызды, өйткені бұл оларға халықаралық деңгейде қарым-қатынас жасауға және пациенттерге сапалы көмек көрсетуге мүмкіндік береді. Қазақ және орыс тілдері қазақстандық медициналық университеттерде оқытудың негізгі тілдері болып табылатынына қарамастан, ағылшын тілін сапалы оқытуға деген сұраныс үнемі артып келеді. Алайда, бүгінгі күні қазақстандық медицина студенттерінің ағылшын тілін үйренудегі ынталары мен қажеттіліктеріне қатысты алшақтық бар. Бұл зерттеу үш аспектіні зерттеуге бағытталған: (а) студенттердің ағылшын тілін үйрену мотивтерін анықтау; (б) университет деңгейіндегі ағылшын тілін кем дегенде бір семестр үйренуден кейін олардың кәсіби қарым-қатынасқа дайындығын бағалау және (в) курс мазмұнын жақсарту бойынша ұсыныстарды анықтау. Анонимді сауалнама әл-Фараби атындағы ҚазҰУ медицина студенттері арасында жүргізілді. Оған кем дегенде бір семестр ағылшын тілін оқыған 95 адам қатысты. Нәтижелер сыртқы мотивациямен салыстырғанда айқын ішкі мотивацияны көрсетті. Сонымен қатар зерттеу жалпы ағылшын және медициналық мақсаттағы ағылшын тілдерін меңгеру арасындағы сенімділік алшақтығын анықтады. Студенттер жалпы ағылшын тілі курсына қанағаттанғанымен, олардың айтарлықтай бөлігі медициналық терминологияға және дәрігердің пациентпен қарым-қатынасы сияқты практикалық дағдыларға көбірек көңіл бөлгісі келеді. Зерттеудің шектеулері — оның бір ғана университетте жүргізілуі және студенттердің өзін-өзі бағалауға негізделуі.

Кілт сөздер: жалпы мақсаттарға арналған ағылшын тілі, медициналық мақсаттарға арналған ағылшын тілі, медицинаның студенттері, студенттердің өзін-өзі бағалауы, кәсіби коммуникация, ішкі мотивация, сыртқы мотивация, курстың мазмұнын жетілдіру.

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Мотивация к изучению английского языка и готовность к профессиональной коммуникации: исследование на основе самооценивания студентов-медиков

Знание английского языка имеет важное значение для студентов-медиков, поскольку оно дает им возможность сотрудничать на международном уровне и оказывать качественную медицинскую помощь пациентам. Несмотря на то, что казахский и русский языки являются основными языками обучения в медицинских университетах Казахстана, растет потребность в совершенствовании преподавания английского языка. В то же время существует дефицит исследований, посвященных мотивации и потребностям казахстанских медицинских студентов в изучении английского языка. Данное исследование направлено на изучение трех аспектов: (а) мотивация студентов к изучению английского языка, (б) оценка их готовности к профессиональному общению на английском языке после как минимум одного семестра его изучения на университетском уровне, и (в) пожелания по улучшению содержания курса. Анонимный опрос был проведен среди 95 студентов медицинского факультета КазНУ имени Аль-Фараби, изучавших английский язык не менее одного семестра. Результаты показали более выраженную внутреннюю мотивацию по сравнению с внешней. Исследование также выявило разрыв в уверенности между владением общим английским и английским для медицинских целей. Студенты в целом были удовлетворены курсом английского языка, однако значительное количество из них выразило желание, чтобы больше внимания уделялось медицинской терминологии и практическим навыкам, таким как общение врача с пациентом. Ограничения исследования включают его проведение только в одном университете и использование самооценки студентов.

Ключевые слова: английский язык для общих целей, английский язык для медицинских целей, медицинские студенты, самооценивание студентов, профессиональная коммуникация, внутренняя мотивация, внешняя мотивация, улучшение содержания курса.

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