

CREATIVE WRITING AND MEDICAL STUDENTS – AN ESP CHALLENGE FOR CREATIVITY

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Abstract

Creativity is the process of giving birth to new things, ideas, and solutions which may not necessarily have existed before. Writing in English is mainly significant for improving creative and critical thinking skills. Some medical students, for example, struggle in creative writing in English as a foreign language due to the negligence of this skill in the ESP courses. Thus, the present study makes a significant contribution to the ESP literature because it investigates ESP students' perceptions about creative language, particularly during their medical English courses and provides recommendations for improving the skills of creative writing in the future. This study aimed at investigating the students' perception on medical English creative writing, and to find out how it can help teachers and material developers to develop creative writing activities in their ESP courses. Furthermore, this study aimed at raising teachers, students, and material writers' awareness about the importance of creative writing in ESP courses, in general, and in medical specialized English language, in particular.

Keywords: Creative writing, ESP, medical students

1. Introduction

Students studying within a university find academic writing a challenging and somehow process as they differ in the knowledge of English, in general, and of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) in particular. Some students who study ESP may have additional language difficulties, such as coherence, summarizing, paraphrasing, and using appropriate lexical items (Kotamjani, Abd Samad, & Fahimirad, 2018) compared to students who take general language courses (Montaner-Villalba, 2021). As commonly encountered, ESP students consider very difficult to master creative writing since it is not part of their academic curriculum even though English is a foreign language widely used in most countries of the world. Creative writing in EFL learning is emphasized (Lutzker, 2015), but it is barely used in ESP courses (Alkhaldi, 2019).

Writing is difficult for EFL learners, but it is an essential language skill (Nunan, 1999) which should be practiced and developed effectively (Colyar, 2009). In other words, writing remains an indispensable skill required for academic and employment purposes. Academic writing, specialized writing and creative writing should complement each other in ESP, the latter being an important skill that needs to be developed at university level. Writing in English is mainly significant for improving creative and critical thinking skills. It promotes students with thinking skills to use the language creatively, to express and organize their thoughts, and improve their critical thinking skills (Rao, 2007).

Maley (2015) differentiates between creative and expository writing, namely: creative writing is artistic, helping students to show their emotions and express their thoughts; however, expository writing is based on conventions and standardized rules. As a result, instructors who teach ESP courses may prefer to deal with expository writing rather than creative writing. There are several reasons for this, such as lack of awareness about the benefits of creative writing, the possible difficulty of teaching creative activities, and the difficulty of assessing the creative tasks; while students who study ESP courses believe that there is no need for creative writing in specialized language courses which shows lack of awareness about the benefits of creative writing in short and long term.

Creativity is useful for students and teachers to deal with continuous world changes and to improve the quality of learning (Maley, 2015). It is the process of 'thinking outside the box', and generating new ideas (Read, 2015). To be creative involves deep knowledge in order to produce new connections, forms of expression and solutions (Pugliese, 2012). In a collaborative work published in 2015 by Tomlinson et al. (2015) creativity has been defined from linguists' perspectives: it explains that creativity is creating something unique or something new which is created for the first time. Alkhaldi (2019) supports the idea that students develop their thinking skills and language skills through creativity, by moulding new and different things which stimulate their creativity and motivate them to stretch their imaginative thinking. In other words, creativity is the process of giving birth to new things, ideas, and solutions which may not necessarily have existed before. As a consequence, integrating creative writing activities in the ESP courses can help students to be creative and create new solutions to the problems that they

may encounter in their other core program courses or in their future careers. This applies successfully to medical students learning medical specialized English language, as well.

Some medical students, for example, struggle in creative writing in English as a foreign language due to the negligence of this skill in the ESP courses. The possible reason for this negligence is due to the common belief of concerned departments that the medical students who study ESP courses need to focus on medical writing rather than on creative writing. The focus on specialized medical writing should not enter in contradiction with creative writing, since both complement each other towards developing students' critical thinking and creativity, which are needed for academic and further use in their future career as doctors.

In medical schools all over Romania, the students have medical English programs for at least 2 years in their academic curricula. Thus, medical English is taught in addition to the other medical subjects, often in accordance with the content of the latter, but in English. The University of Medicine and Pharmacy of Craiova makes no exception; namely, medical students study Medical English (as ESP) for the first two years of their academic training. The textbooks and materials used by the instructors aim at improving the reading, listening, speaking and writing skills of the students, mainly as far as the medical specialized language is concerned.

Creativity for medical students learning medical English, however, can be promoted if the students are asked to read and write any creative piece of writing. Wang (2012) suggested that reading continuously promotes creative writing and creativity. Therefore, during ESP courses reading and writing for creative purposes need to be enhanced for a better quality of teaching and learning English as a foreign language. Unfortunately, neither writing nor creative writing was given a priority in the ESP teaching and learning process. Students believe that extracurricular linguistic-related activities or tasks or watching movies can promote creative writing and creativity. Also, an active participation in academic, creative events such as ESP creative writing competitions or story telling competitions in a foreign language may also develop students' confidence, increase their motivation, and promote their creativity (Alkhalidi et. al, 2022).

The present study makes a significant contribution to the ESP literature because it investigates ESP students' perceptions about creative language, particularly during their medical ESP courses and provides recommendations for improving the skills of creative writing in the future. the curriculum, especially in ESP and EAP courses. Therefore, this article elaborates the significance of creativity and creative writing in ESP, in general, and in medical English course, in particular, suggesting a systematic, principled framework for teaching creative writing in such courses.

2. Material and Method

This study aimed at investigating the students' perception on medical English creative writing, and to find out how it can help teachers and material developers to develop creative writing activities in their ESP courses. Furthermore, this study aimed at raising teachers, students, and material writers' awareness about the importance of creative witing in ESP courses, in general, and in medical specialized English language, in particular. The study was conducted on 112 medical students enrolled in the 1st and 2nd year within the University of Medicine and Pharmacy of Craiova, studying medical English one hour a week for 28 weeks per year. There were proposed four themes of creative writing using medical specialized language in English for a final essay to be presented in a workshop session at the end of their period of studying medical English (namely at the end of the 2nd academic year). The students received an anonymous Google form via e-mail, asking them which of the following themes for the essay seemed more interesting and more providing for them with a larger set of creative elements (Figure 1).

Creative Writing and ESP

Creative writing and medical English within the University of Medicine and Pharmacy of Craiova

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Please state which of the following themes seems more interesting and provides you with a larger set of creative elements for writing an essay using medical English.

- Imagine you are a stem cell travelling throughout the whole human body. Describe the organs that you encounter during your journey, the function and localization of every organ and decide in which organ you want to remain for the rest of your cell life and why.
- Once upon a time there was an ambitious teenager dreaming of becoming a doctor...
- You are a baby tooth and want to make friends with other teeth in the human mouth. Write about what teeth will accompany you in this journey, who you will lose on the way and what new friends will come along.
- A stem cell is travelling throughout the whole human dentition. Describe the teeth that it encounters during its journey, the function and localization of every tooth and decide in which tooth it wants to remain for the rest of its cell life and why.
- Altele: _____

Trimite
Golește formularul

Figure 1. Example of Google form sent to students with the proposed themes for writing a creative essay using medical English.

3. Findings

After analysing the anonymous responses of the medical students to the question of the questionnaire presented in the previous section regarding the four themes proposed, the results showed that the majority, namely 62 students (55.4%), chose the first theme proposed (*Imagine you are a stem cell travelling throughout the whole human body. Describe the organs that you encounter during your journey, the function and localization of every organ and decide in which organ you want to remain for the rest of your cell life and why.*) as the most interesting theme, followed by the second theme proposed (*Once upon a time there was a teenager dreaming of becoming a doctor...*), with 32 students (28.6%) considering it as providing them with a larger set of creative elements. The third and fourth themes proposed (*You are a baby tooth and want to make friends with other teeth in the human mouth. Write about what teeth will accompany you in this journey, who you will lose on the way and what new friends will come along.* and *A stem cell is travelling throughout the whole human dentition. Describe the teeth it encounters during its journey, the function and localization of every tooth and decide in which tooth the stem cell wants to remain for the rest of its cell life and why.*) enchanted only 12 students (10.7%) and 6 (5.4%), respectively. The results may be found in Figure 2 below:

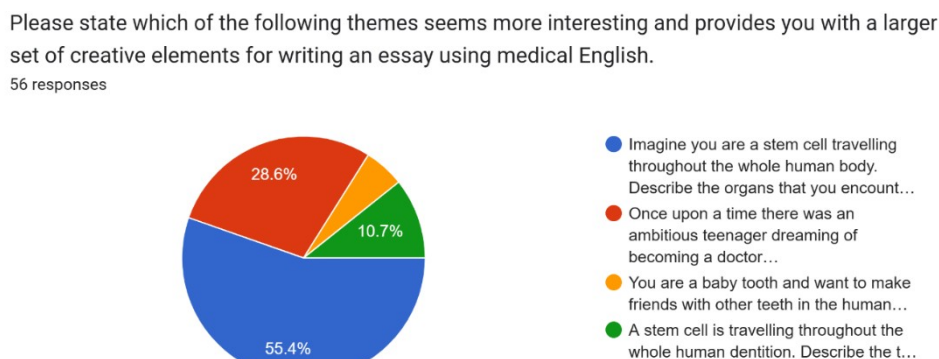


Figure 2. Students answers for the proposed themes as most interesting and most creative for them.

As it may be observed, the themes proposed bring a personal touch, the main character of the story being the student himself/ herself. This makes students be more relaxed and focused on the creative part of the task, rather than on general medical knowledge, usually found in specialized medical writing tasks. Still, all the proposed

themes for this study entangle both creative writing elements and medical specialized knowledge, making the whole process more challenging for the medical students studying medical English within the University of Medicine and Pharmacy of Craiova.

4. Discussion

Creative writing should be included in ESP courses, in general, and in medical English courses, in particular, while the students should be encouraged to increase their confidence and to think and write creatively in the target language. As in Dougherty's study on Emirati students, creative writing is and should be a motivational experience (Dougherty, 2010). On the same path, Ellis (1994) insists on the importance of motivation in developing learners' creative writing skills. Self-esteem and self-confidence among learners is important, this being a helpful factor for them in order to increase their motivation and to achieve an effective language learning (Dörnyei, 2009; Maley, 2012; Maley, 2013). One of the most essential parts of practising and developing creative writing is motivation, as in the absence of it, there will be no effective learning. As a result, all students who study English for special purposes, including those studying medical English, should be motivated well enough to be engaged in creative writing. As Maley stated, creative writing helps the students to develop their English language as a foreign language at all levels (Maley, 2015), but teaching practice has shown that usually students concentrate on sentence skills such as spelling and grammar when they revise and edit their writing, rather than focusing on logical organization of ideas and coherence.

Due to the fact that English language is used as a medium of instruction within many medical schools in Romania, linguists and materials writers have provided the field with well-developed techniques and input to master the language properly. Writing skills are one of the most essential skills in teaching ESP within universities, especially in the field of medical English. Specialized medical writing activities are usually offered to improve students' writing abilities, and the main focus is on improving traditional writing or technical writing skills. Creative writing, however, may not be adequately emphasized in these courses, as it was not considered essential or practical for the future doctors using medical English. However, creative writing plays a key role not only in learning medical English for communicative purposes, but also in learning it for other purposes such as developing creativity for lifelong learning. While teaching creativity *per se* is impossible, teachers should incorporate creative methods into their lessons in order to foster creativity in learners (Maley, 2015).

Our study revealed the need for having creative writing included in the process of teaching and learning medical English within the University of Medicine and Pharmacy of Craiova. The students showed great interest in the four themes proposed and created wonderful essay that were presented within a workshop held at the end of the previous academic year. We encourage all the ESP teachers to embrace creative writing and implement it during their teaching process. We believe that the present study may be useful for further research in the field of creative writing and ESP teaching and learning, alongside with a practical feature that may apply to students from other universities that learn specialized languages.

5. Conclusions

Reading and creative writing can be a rich source for teaching creativity and promoting students to think creatively, but, unfortunately, they are scarcely found in ESP courses. Therefore, we highly recommend the development of ESP courses by including interesting reading and creative writing activities which can positively enhance the learning of medical specialized language in English, increase students' confidence, improve fluency, develop creativity, and support effective learning. This study comes to provide valid and reliable findings and bridges the gap between the related literature and ESP creative writing, namely in medical English teaching and learning. If the students are not well-motivated to read and write creatively, they will achieve limited progress in creative writing while studying a specialized language. The students should be encouraged to read critically and write creatively to achieve effective language learning and develop their creativity. Creative writing activities should constitute a key part during medical English courses, and more ESP courses should be included in the undergraduate study plans. Finally, more related studies are recommended using different research instruments and having more samples from other specializations and institutions.

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