

# An Irrelevant Syllabus? Medical Students' Insights Into the English Syllabus at Hail University

Eman Matar M. Alshammari

English Department, University of Hail, Hail, Saudi Arabia

**Abstract**—English is widely used in global business, science, and technology, making it an essential skill for undergraduates in Saudi Arabian universities. Additionally, English is a requirement for students to communicate effectively in various fields, such as computing and medicine, in Saudi universities. Learners' evaluation of their syllabus plays a crucial role at most higher education institutions. This study, a collaborative effort between students, teachers, and researchers, provides insightful information about how learners perceive and evaluate the English syllabus used in their medical courses. Data on evaluating the English syllabus were obtained from questionnaires completed by 44 first-year medical students at the University of Hail (UOH). Semi-structured interviews were conducted with five teachers to acquire more specific and detailed information. Therefore, the present study uses a mix of quantitative and qualitative methods to evaluate the English syllabus for first-year medical undergraduates, which could help to tackle areas of weakness and ensure that the syllabus remains relevant to students' needs. The results of the current study show that the English syllabus does not meet the needs of medical students at UOH. It is concluded that the English syllabus, specifically the English syllabus within the medical department at UOH, requires significant revision. It is hoped that this research will guide educators and decision-makers in addressing areas of weakness and ensuring that the syllabus remains aligned with students' evolving needs.

**Index Terms**—English syllabus evaluation, University of Hail, medical students, English language syllabus level and content, EFL students

## I. INTRODUCTION

### A. *The Importance of Learning English in Saudi Arabia*

English is widely considered an international language which is used by people from various linguistic backgrounds to communicate effectively. Much information, including scientific research, news, and educational resources, is available in English, making it essential for knowledge acquisition. English is often the primary language in most academic fields, including international medical communication. Medical professionals usually pursue further education and training delivered in English. As English language skills play a crucial role in the global healthcare industry, there is a pressing need to enhance medical English teaching (Guan & Scott, 2024). Over the previous couple of decades, there has been significant development in English-medium teaching programmes at Saudi universities and colleges (Alqarni et al., 2024; Alnasser, 2022; Al-Hoorie et al., 2021; Allmnakrah & Evers, 2020; Almoaili & Alnasser, 2019; Elyas, 2008, 2011; Elyas & Picard, 2010, 2013, 2018; Elyas & Badawood, 2016; Elyas & Al-Ghamdi, 2018; Phan & Barnawi, 2015; Barnawi & Al-Hawsawi, 2017; Barnawi, 2017, 2021a, 2021b). Several factors have contributed to this rapid expansion of English-medium instruction in Saudi Arabia. These include the drive for globalisation (Phan & Barnawi, 2015), economic development (Elyas & Picard, 2013; Elyas & Al-Ghamdi, 2018), the need for instructional reforms (Allmnakrah & Evers, 2020), and the ambition to improve universities' rankings (Kirkpatrick, 2014; Tsou et al., 2017), all within the context of a more interconnected global environment (De Costa et al., 2020). These factors have led to the widespread adoption of English-based instruction, especially at top-tier universities in Saudi Arabia (De Costa et al., 2021). They are part of a broader movement toward creating globalised universities (Collini, 2012). Medical students at UOH study English in their preparation year, and they go on to study English language for beginners in year one at medical college. In year one, medical students study all the medical subjects in English, and Engl-100 is a required English course. The researcher noticed some unofficial complaints about the English syllabus from year-one medical students, and it was also observed that 100% of both male and female medical students got an A+ grade in the Engl-100 syllabus. Therefore, this study evaluated the English syllabus according to students' perspectives and suggestions for improving the syllabus.

### B. *Evaluation*

Over the past two decades, educational institutions have faced increasing pressure from various sources to assess and enhance their programmes. As a result, the current assessment, evaluation, and improvement process are far more complex and very different from how they were fifty years ago—or even two decades ago—with competing standards, priorities, findings, and claims, making it challenging for practitioners and consumers to navigate (Stufflebeam & Shinkfield, 2007).

As a result, evaluators must guide the evaluation process and plan evaluations carefully, considering how every step, from start to finish, will influence its eventual use (Patton, 2008).

### C. Syllabus Evaluation

Assessing a syllabus is essential to ensure that it fulfils the learning objectives. Assessing how engaging and compelling the current syllabus can lead to adjustments that improve student motivation and participation. In short, ongoing evaluation of the English syllabus helps to maintain its quality, relevance, and effectiveness, ultimately enhancing the educational experience for students. For instance, medical learners must become acquainted with the demands of their future profession through real-life experiences to advance professionally (Salehi et al., 2015). It is essential to pay close attention to students' opinions to maintain a comprehensive overview of all aspects of the English language syllabus. Recognising learners' perceptions is crucial to teachers' and university leaders/managers' roles in creating an effective educational environment (Al-Mutairi & Elsayy, 2021).

Previous studies in this field have revealed the importance of syllabus evaluation, such as research conducted by Usman and Anwar (2021), which focused on evaluating the English for Specific Purposes (ESP) syllabus for first-semester nursing students. The study was grounded in a needs analysis framework. The evaluation of the ESP syllabus for nursing students showed that it needs to be revised to align with the findings of the needs analysis. Meanwhile, research by Le and Tran (2021) explored the perceptions of 100 English as a foreign language (EFL) students regarding an English language training curriculum designed for English majors at a university in Vietnam. The findings indicated that the students believed the curriculum's five components—objectives, content, materials, teaching methods, and assessment—were not optimised. Additionally, the participants recommended making specific adjustments to these components to enhance the curriculum's effectiveness and better align it with students' requirements.

The actual language needs of medical students are often overlooked by those who create educational materials, who may not fully understand the specific language demands of individual faculties (Sojoodizadeh et al., 2020). English departments at these universities should work to create supportive programmes for learners in the medical field to enhance their interaction skills. Additionally, the results indicate that analysing learners' language expectations must go beyond just reading; the goal is to develop a range of skills to make them better prepared for effective interaction in English.

The study addresses the following research question:

Is the English syllabus suitable for year one medical students at UOH?

Previous studies have shown a noticeable gap between learners' needs and the syllabuses they study, leading to student dissatisfaction. In this context, our study is designed to evaluate the English syllabus for year one medical students, focusing on students' perceptions, to ensure its relevance. We employed both quantitative and qualitative methods to gain a more comprehensive understanding of students' evaluation of their English syllabus. The insights gained will be instrumental in enhancing the syllabus to better meet learners' needs and improve their progress. The current study concludes by discussing the practical implications for educators and learners, providing actionable recommendations and paving the way for future studies.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

This section discusses the definition of evaluation and various types of syllabus evaluations before examining previous studies about syllabus evaluation.

Evaluation involves assessing the quality, significance, and value of something or the outcome or result of evaluations (Scriven, 1991). Rossi et al. (2004) defined programme evaluation as “the use of social research methods to systematically investigate the effectiveness of social intervention programs in ways adapted to their political and organizational environments and designed to inform social action to improve social conditions” (p. 28).

The following comprise the three main types of evaluation: diagnostic, formative, and summative assessment (see, e.g., Chufama, 2021; Liu, 2012). Diagnostic evaluation helps learners to assess their understanding or abilities within a specific area, ensuring that any misconceptions are addressed before further education occurs (Boud, 1995). Formative evaluation focuses on tracking the implementation of programmes and analysing the processes involved (Altschuld & Austin, 2006). In contrast, summative evaluation is concerned with the findings or consequences of the programme, providing insights for final determinations about how the course should be taught, for instance. It focuses on evaluating the extent to which a learner has met predefined formal objectives (Bloom et al., 1971).

The following are examples of diagnostic evaluation: preliminary tests (on knowledge and skills), self-evaluations (assessing abilities), forum posts (on topic-specific questions), and interviews (short, individual 10-minute discussions with each learner) (Chufama, 2021). Some of the main types of formative assessment include: observing learners' in-class tasks; homework assignments that are used as preparation for exams and class discussions; reflective journals assessed regularly throughout the term; question and answer discussions, both structured and spontaneous; and student feedback gathered through periodic responses to targeted questions about the instruction and their self-assessment of achievement and development. Examples of summative evaluation are: exams; final exams (a definitive summative evaluation); projects submitted in stages as formative evaluations; teachers' self-assessments; and learners' course evaluations.

Earlier research has examined medical students' English language needs from various perspectives and across different

global environments. Student course evaluations are a prevalent and essential aspect of the higher education environment. Some previous ESP evaluation studies have revealed mismatches between students' expectations of their English textbooks and the textbooks used to teach the course. For instance, Le et al. (2021) examined how learners evaluate the ESP syllabus used at a medical college in Vietnam. This study is significant for educators and syllabus designers as it provides insights into the effectiveness of the ESP syllabus in a specific context. After a year of use, the users, including medical students and their instructors, provided feedback informally. The findings of this research showed that learners were generally satisfied with the ESP coursebook, particularly regarding its coverage of the four areas of proficiency (reading, writing, speaking, listening), the inclusion of vocabulary and grammar, relevant content, a clear social and cultural context, and its suitability for mixed-level learners. However, participants generally agreed that the coursebook did not adequately address interactive abilities, that the grammar examples could be more engaging, that the visuals lacked variety and quantity, and that the cover was plain and unappealing.

The recent growth of online teaching, especially following the COVID-19 pandemic, represents a significant shift away from traditional instructor-focused approaches towards more student-focused classrooms. As ESP is a learner-centered approach, web-based instruction effectively supports the concepts associated with ESP, such as promoting self-directed learning, independent choices, flexibility in terms of time and location, and how the role of teachers is evolving from teaching to guiding (Meddour, 2015). Therefore, it is of value to investigate the effectiveness of online learning in an ESP environment. Course evaluation by students has become an essential feedback resource for instructors to assess programme presentations and evaluate the effectiveness of their teaching. A study by Meddour (2015) assessed the efficacy of an online-focused ESP course delivered to 42 master's learners in Computer Science at Biskra University. It also evaluated how well the teacher met the programme goals regarding addressing the students' requirements. A summative assessment list was used as the study tool with which to achieve this. The results indicated that students approved of their engagement in various web-based activities and the feedback provided by the instructor. Nevertheless, learners expressed discontent with the impersonal nature of online-based teaching and felt that it did not adequately equip them for educational and career-related difficulties.

In contrast, research by Salehi et al. (2015) and Hadi and Zahra (2024) aimed to assess the ESP textbooks used in university medical courses. Both studies showed that instructors and learners held positive views about the content of their ESP textbooks. However, these studies also identified potential areas for improvement, such as the need for more authentic texts. Students who participated in those studies added that using more authentic texts in their course would be preferable, as the textbook alone would not equip them for their future careers. Additionally, the findings indicated that there was a notable difference in the perspectives of teachers and students towards the ESP textbooks (Salehi et al., 2015). Furthermore, recent research by Guan and Scott (2024) found that the course materials, learning setting, and teacher efficiency were key elements that shaped students' perceptions of the quality of medical English courses. Learners highlighted the necessity for more effective and relevant content, noting that the existing materials and course books did not adequately prepare them for the interaction challenges that they would face in their medical careers.

There is a lack of research on this topic within the Saudi setting. One of the few relevant studies in the Saudi context was conducted by Alrashed and Abdel Latif (2025), which explored the English language challenges faced by Saudi university medical learners, the strategies they employed to address these challenges, their assessment of the English instruction at their institutions, and their views on their requirements for English language skills. The learners' greatest language needs were found to be enhancing their medical vocabulary and speaking skills, while they were least concerned about listening. Although they generally appreciated the efforts of medical faculty and language instructors to improve their English, they expressed less satisfaction with the English courses offered at their universities. They felt that more emphasis should be placed on developing learners' expressive language abilities and ensuring that they can interact fluently using the medical vocabulary to improve their medical English education. Alhamami and Almelhi (2021) conducted a study using two questionnaires to examine English as the teaching medium in healthcare programmes. They identified several challenges involved in using English to teach medical learners in Saudi Arabia, namely that learners' weak English abilities negatively impacted their academic performance, with listening and speaking fluency being their primary deficiencies. Similarly, Qadeer and Chow (2023) conducted a study using a student questionnaire and teacher interviews to assess English language obstacles among foundation-year healthcare learners at a Saudi university. Their findings showed that learners struggled more with writing and reading than listening and speaking skills, with writing being their most challenging language skill.

Several studies have focused on the English language requirements of Arab university medical learners. Sabbour et al. (2010) distributed a questionnaire designed to gather opinions from medical learners and teachers in Egypt about the use of English as a medium for teaching. As a result of the many challenges they faced in relation to English, most learners in this study preferred to use Arabic for their medical courses and relied on translation during their studies. Mohamed et al.'s (2024) survey showed that medical students in the United Arab Emirates greatly valued ESP courses, as their primary language goal was to improve their medical vocabulary and communication skills. Farea and Singh (2024) employed a mixed methods approach to determine the language needs of medical learners in Yemen. Their study uncovered differences in how learners and teachers prioritised language abilities. While learners considered listening and reading the most crucial skills, their instructors considered writing and listening more important. Using a survey conducted at a Bahrain university, Tayem et al. (2020) investigated the English language challenges that might affect medical learners'

performance. Most learners believed that their degree of English competence did not impact their academic results. The research also highlighted concerns among Bahraini learners about their performance in terms of using medical vocabulary and oral English skills.

Another set of pertinent studies was carried out in non-Arab Middle Eastern contexts. For example, Sadeghi et al. (2013) explored the relationship between Iranian medical learners' English proficiency and their performance in healthcare courses. The findings showed a significant link between the learners' English skills and academic success. Additionally, two other recent studies have been published regarding the language requirements of medical learners in Iran. The study by Atai and Abbasi (2023) found a disparity between how students and medical faculty members rated the significance of learners' language requirements. While the learners required improvement in all areas of language, the English courses offered only addressed their reading skill requirements. Meanwhile, Khalili and Tahririan (2023) discovered challenges in teaching medical English across five Iranian medical institutions due to inappropriate materials, students' low levels of engagement, and the diverse proficiency levels in English classes. Their research also showed that listening, speaking, writing, and reading skills were not consistently practiced in the English courses on which learners were enrolled.

Kayaoğlu and Dağ Akbaş (2016) examined the academic English requirements of medical learners in Turkey by using a survey that addressed the learners' reasons for learning English and the skills they needed. Their results indicated that speaking was the most crucial skill for learners to develop, followed by listening, reading, and writing. Lodhi et al. (2018) surveyed the English language requirements of medical learners in Pakistan and practicing doctors. They discovered a significant disparity between the English skills needed in the workplace and the English teaching offered to medical learners. The participants in their research emphasised the need for various forms of English education to be incorporated into medical curricula. Meanwhile, Gayessa and Mohammed (2024) investigated the English language requirements of health sciences learners at a university in Ethiopia using qualitative observation and interview methods. Their findings revealed that, in comparison to reading and grammar, learners faced more significant challenges with writing, medical vocabulary, speaking, and listening.

Wahyuni (2021) conducted a study set in Indonesia that used a survey to examine the English language needs of medical students in both academic and professional contexts. Most participants identified enhancing their English listening and speaking skills as their primary professional language requirements. Regarding academic needs, the learners prioritised interactive skills and methods for academic reading. In a mixed strategy piece of research that employed a survey and learner and instructor interviews, Reynolds et al. (2023) explored the challenges faced by Taiwanese learners in learning English healthcare terminology. The findings revealed that learners struggled with unfamiliar medical terms due to a lack of contextual writing practice, limited instructor feedback on terminology usage, and limited exchange of information among instructors about instructional approaches.

Addressing essential factors such as the motivational environment is more effective than simplifying the course. Another study by Reverter et al. (2020) gathered data from learners' assessments over a three-year period, from 2015 to 2018. The study suggests that while student evaluations are often seen as a measure of teaching effectiveness, they are more strongly influenced by the learning environment and motivational factors than course difficulty or teaching style. The authors argue for a more nuanced understanding of student feedback and highlight the importance of fostering a supportive, engaging, and motivating educational environment. This underscores the educators' role in creating such an environment.

A further study by Jones et al. (2022) explored the relationship between the motivational environment and learners' assessment of instruction. The results showed a strong connection between students' evaluations of instruction and the motivational climate. Additionally, learners evaluated programmes less favourably when they perceived them as more straightforward, even after accounting for the motivational environment and the demographic composition of the class. These findings suggest that enhancing the motivational climate, including factors such as encouraging autonomous learning, relevance, expectations of success, situational engagement, and support, rather than merely simplifying courses, could offer a more practical approach to enhancing learners' assessments of education.

### III. METHODOLOGY

#### A. *Participants*

The current study stands out in its approach. It utilises quantitative and qualitative methods to delve into students' evaluations of the current English coursebook. This comprehensive method enables a more thorough understanding of the students' perspectives.

Evaluating a programme using qualitative methods is a potential substitute for quantitative assessments, yet there has been less research into their effectiveness than quantitative methods. Therefore, Steyn et al.'s (2018) research addressed this gap by exploring and evaluating a new approach to collecting qualitative responses from learners at a higher education institution in South Africa. The programme assessment approach offers insights into the aspects of instruction that matter to learners as they reflect on their educational journey. The research findings also highlight the significance that learners attach to assessments. However, it could be argued that the focus on assessments may have diminished the importance of other elements of learners' educational journey. Furthermore, the results of the learners' evaluation are valuable because they can be used to guide significant enhancements in the course material and teaching techniques. More constructive

feedback was generated by encouraging learners to suggest ways to enhance the programme rather than merely asking for an evaluation. These comments, particularly the learners' suggestions, promise significant improvements in the syllabus. These comments were thought to be more beneficial than the evaluative feedback typically collected through questionnaire-based evaluation. Therefore, we asked for students' assessment and suggestions regarding their ESP syllabus in the current study.

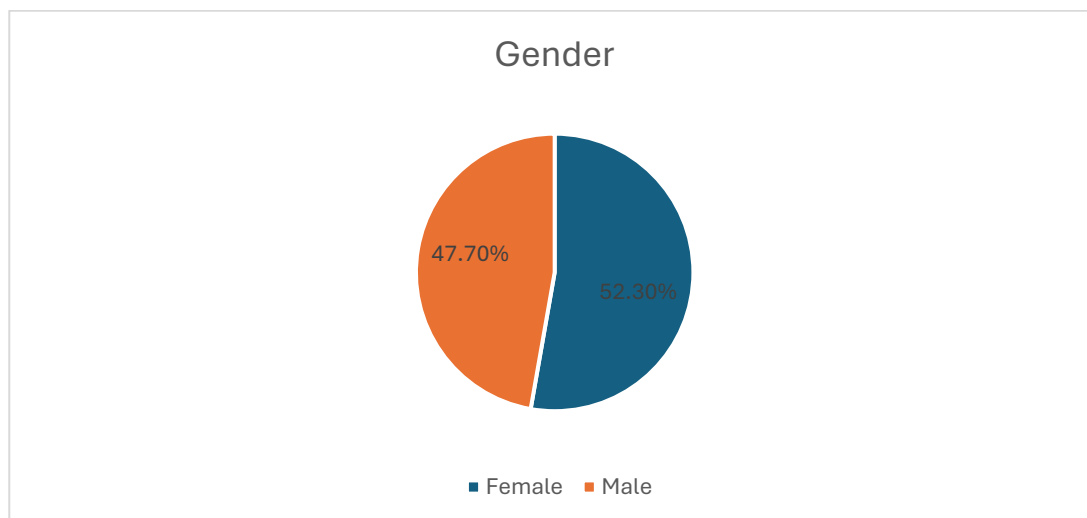


Figure 1. Gender of the Participants

The study involving 44 students, 52.3% female and 47.7% male first-year medical students (see Figure 1) and five instructors, was conducted with thoroughness and attention to detail. The questionnaires and interviews were conducted in the participants' native language (Arabic) to ensure their understanding and increase the research's validity. The surveys provided critical views from the students regarding the content of their English syllabus, and the semi-structured interviews with the teachers helped to give a more detailed understanding of the students' responses to the questionnaire. Previous studies (e.g., Steyn et al., 2018) have indicated that qualitative programme assessments offer a more comprehensive, learner-focused view of the learner journey than quantitative assessments. However, qualitative methods offer a more thorough, contextually nuanced understanding of the learner journey, providing insights widely seen as valuable for enhancing instruction and the overall educational quality. Ethical approval was obtained from all participants before data collection to ensure compliance with the ethical requirements for conducting the study.

#### B. Data Analysis

SPSS, a widely used piece of statistical software, was chosen to analyse the quantitative data and produce graphs due to its ability to handle large datasets and perform complex statistical analyses. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the qualitative data. The information obtained from the interviews was examined using thematic analysis, a technique for recognising, exploring, and presenting patterns in the data. Thematic analysis is valued for its flexibility and ease of use, making it well-suited to the qualitative focus of this study, as it emphasises the content of participants' responses—the 'what', rather than how it is expressed (Willig & Rogers, 2017). As Braun and Clarke (2006) note, "Through its theoretical freedom, thematic analysis provides a flexible and useful research tool, which can potentially provide a rich and detailed, yet complex, account of data" (p. 5).

### IV. RESULTS

The following section presents this study's survey and interview findings, which are discussed later in the discussion section concerning previous literature.

#### A. Questionnaire Data

The surveys were distributed to 52.3% female and 47.7% male first-year medical students at the UOH.

Is the English language syllabus content suitable for improving my English? If so, why?

Only two students out of 44 thought that the English content of Engl-100 was suitable for their needs, while most considered the content inappropriate for improving their English proficiency. When asked why, several students mentioned that it was mainly because the English syllabus that they are currently studying in year one is much easier than the English syllabus that they followed in the foundation year; it is essentially a repetition of what they had previously studied at school. Other students stated that their English textbooks were equivalent to those used at primary school level, and not university level. Additionally, one student stressed the importance of learning English to help them understand the medical subjects taught in English. Nevertheless, their English syllabus (Engl-100) was perceived as too simple. "It is a waste of our time to study this level of English language," student S3 reported, referring to Engl-100 classes they had

taken in year one.

Furthermore, the students expressed a strong desire for more advanced English content. Several participants noted that the English content they had previously studied in the foundation year was significantly more advanced than that which they were learning in year one. “If we have already passed much more advanced English subjects in the foundation year, why are we repeating studying English with much easier content?” S12 questioned. S1 added, “I hoped that medical terminology would be included, and the number of unrelated terms found in some sections of the textbook reduced”. The students' plea for more advanced English to help them learn medical subjects more effectively was clear and urgent.

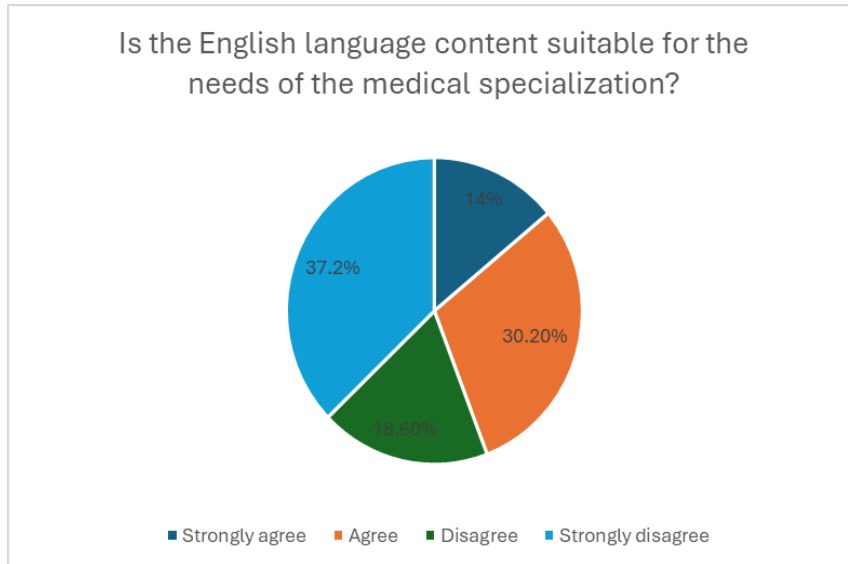


Figure 2. Is the English Language Content Suitable for the Needs of the Medical Specialisation?

Figure 2 indicates that, from the student's perspective, 55.8% found the English language syllabus unsuitable for their medical specialisation needs, while 44.2% thought it was suitable. This perspective, consistent with the results of the previous question, highlights the students' struggle with a syllabus that is below their current level of English and contains content unrelated to their medical specialisation.

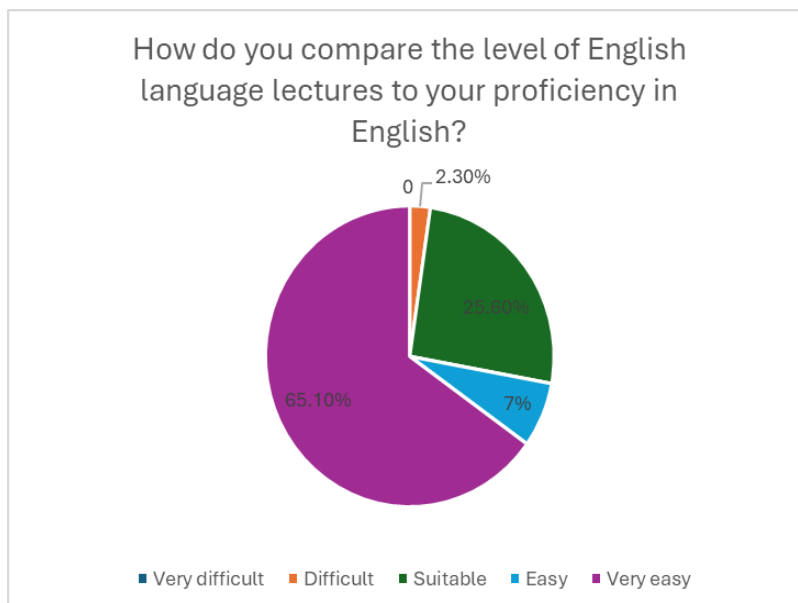


Figure 3. How Would You Compare the Level of English Language Lectures to Your Proficiency in English?

The above Figure reveals that 65.1% of year one medical students considered the level of the English language lectures elementary compared to their proficiency in English, while 7% considered it easy. Meanwhile, 25.6% considered it suitable for their level, and only 2.3% thought it was tricky. This result corresponds to their grades in Engl-100, as it was found that 100% of the medical students got A+.

What are your suggestions for improving the English language syllabus overall?

Students' answers to this question mainly centred on improving their English syllabus to match their level of English

proficiency, making the content related to their medical specialisation, and focusing on improving their speaking skills. Some participants responded to this question with suggestions for improving their English syllabus. However, four participants suggested removing the English course from the syllabus or not making it mandatory for first-year medical students, as they study their medical curricula in English, which means their English level will have already improved. Most of the students' comments in response to these questions indicated that the English course they studied in year one is too simple and below their proficiency level, and the content is unrelated to their field. For instance, S11 suggested: "Please remove the English course in year one. It is just a repetition of what we have already taken in the preparatory year". Thus, S2 concluded: "Why waste my time on an English course that is below the level of the English syllabus at the preparatory level?". Furthermore, S5 stressed the importance of improving the syllabus level to match their needs: "We need more advanced English to help us with our medical subjects taught in English." Meanwhile, S9 added:

"As for the English course in the first year of medical school, there were no medical terms in the syllabus, and most of the grammar had already been covered extensively in the preparatory year. The vocabulary was elementary, so there was no real difference—it felt like we were studying it again. This does not help with language development when the learning level remains basic and repetitive".

Other participants offered suggestions about how the English language syllabus could be improved, such as by making it more suitable for their current level of English proficiency. Furthermore, it was proposed that the person responsible for choosing their English syllabus should consider the students' specialisation when deciding on an appropriate English syllabus so that the content could be tailored accordingly: "Reduce the amount of vocabulary unrelated to medicine and its terminology, and increasing the amount of medical vocabulary," S6 suggested. The English language syllabus content should be appropriate for the goals of the medical college. It was also suggested that the focus of the English exam should be on speaking and other language skills to improve students' speaking skills and on practising speaking using the English language, as they did in the foundation year. S7 suggested that "a regular session or part of the curriculum should be held throughout the year within the English course, where we have to speak in English on a specific (medical) topic, which would help us learn to speak English and build self-confidence".

#### *B. Interview Data*

Five teachers who teach year one medical students at the UOH participated in the current research by providing their views and suggestions regarding the English syllabus content for first-year medical students, which yielded more in-depth information. Two participants undertaking administrative roles as well as their teaching roles at the UOH revealed that they had received emails from students expressing dissatisfaction with the English classes: "I receive emails from students asking to drop the Engl-100 syllabus as it is too easy and there is no point attending the classes... it is a waste of time". The teacher interview data revealed that some medical students asked some of their teacher/administrators to drop the Engl-100 syllabus because they felt it was too easy and, therefore, there was no point in attending the classes. However, they were not allowed to do so because attending Engl-100 classes is a university requirement. All the teachers suggested a more advanced English syllabus for year one medical students, explicitly focusing on medical content matching students' perspectives.

### V. DISCUSSION

This section discusses the current research results encompassing students' views and suggestions about their English syllabus in light of previous literature. Firstly, according to the results of the current study, most students believe that the level and content of the current English syllabus are not beneficial, not relevant, too easy, and, therefore, a waste of time. They also felt that the content did not apply to their medical specialisation. Consequently, it does not meet their needs, which corresponds with their teachers' views, as they also believe that the level of the English textbook used in the course is below the students' English proficiency level and the content is not relevant.

The results shown in Chart 3 are similar to those obtained for the first question, whereby the majority agreed that the English language syllabus content is unsuitable for their goals of improving students' English, and it is far below their current level of English proficiency. Similarly, according to Chart 3, most of the participants considered the level of the English language lectures to be elementary compared to their proficiency in English. Similarly, the results of the second question aligned with both of the aforementioned results, as more than half of the students disagreed when asked if the English language syllabus's content was suitable for their medical specialisation needs, which is supported by previous studies such as Alrashed and Abdel Latif (2025). However, this result contradicts findings from previous research, such as Salehi et al. (2015) and Hadi and Zahra (2024), who reported that teachers and students held positive opinions about the content of their ESP syllabus. However, the current study concurred with previous studies such as those by Le et al. (2021) and Meddour (2015), Usman and Anwar (2021), and Le and Tran (2021), in which students expressed negative opinions about their course and stated that it did not meet their needs. Therefore, the English syllabus must be improved to better align with students' needs.

The interview results corresponded with students' perspectives when the participants were asked if the content of the English syllabus was suitable for their level of English proficiency, a statement with which the majority disagreed, as well as when asked how they find the level of the English language lectures compared to their proficiency in English, in response to which most of them chose 'very easy' (see Chart 3). This aligned with the fact that all of the medical students

got a grade of A+ in Engl-100, and was also in accordance with the teachers' interview data. For example, teacher 1 stated that he believes the current English syllabus is below the proficiency level of the medical students. It appears that the teachers' views about the English syllabus support the students' opinions regarding the deficiencies of the English syllabus that they studied in year one, due to it not being appropriate for their proficiency level. According to the data from the present study, it appears that the medical students were not satisfied with the English classes that they studied in year one, which contradicted the findings of Salehi et al. (2015) and Hadi and Zahra (2024), as they found that both teachers and students had positive opinions regarding the content of their ESP textbooks. However, it aligned with previous studies in that the English course for medical students did not meet their needs in certain respects, such as its irrelevant content (e.g., Khalili & Tahririan, 2023; Reynolds et al., 2023; Lodhi et al., 2018; Guan & Scott, 2024; Le et al., 2021) and, therefore, when students were asked about their suggestions for improving the English syllabus, they emphasised the need for more impactful and applicable material to equip them for the communication obstacles that they would encounter when practicing in their medical professions (Guan & Scott, 2024).

Furthermore, the students who participated in the current study were convinced that they needed more advanced English with relevant medical content to help them improve in the other medical subjects they were studying that were taught in English. This result aligns with Sadeghi et al.'s (2013) findings, highlighting a strong connection between the students' English abilities and educational achievements.

Secondly, the findings of this research also revealed the main reasons why students believe that the English textbook is not suitable for them, with the majority confirming that their English syllabus is too easy compared to their level of English proficiency. It is possible that improving the motivational environment by focusing on variables such as ensuring relevance and providing assistance may be a more effective strategy for enhancing learners' perceptions of education rather than merely simplifying the course (Jones et al., 2022; Reverter et al., 2020).

Furthermore, participants in the current study suggested several crucial factors to consider when choosing their English syllabus. For example, to improve the English syllabus for medical students, it should be tailored to their proficiency level and relevant to their field of study. When selecting the syllabus, the students' specialisation should be considered to ensure that the content aligns with their medical focus. Additionally, English speaking skills should be considered alongside other language abilities, and practical communication should be encouraged, as suggested by the participating students. The notion that medical students need to improve their speaking skills is supported by previous research such as Alrashed and Abdel Latif (2025), Ani (2024), Tayem et al. (2020), Wahyuni (2021), Kayaoğlu and Dağ Akbaş (2016), Le et al. (2021), and Alhamami and Almelhi (2021), which found that students prioritised the importance of focusing on improving their oral skills. However, it contradicted Qadeer and Chow (2023), who reported that students need more help with writing and reading than speaking skills. Additionally, the syllabus should align with the goals of the medical programme and include regular sessions in which students speak about medical topics, thus helping them to enhance their language skills and build confidence. Sojoodizadeh et al. (2020) highlight that the unique language needs of medical students are often overlooked by those whose job is to develop educational materials, who may not fully grasp the specific language demands of medical disciplines. Therefore, it was suggested that English departments should design targeted programmes to improve medical learners' interaction skills. Additionally, the study emphasises that addressing language expectations must go beyond reading and aim to develop a broad set of skills to better prepare students for effective communication in English.

## VI. CONCLUSION

The current study achieved its aim by exploring medical students' opinions and recommendations regarding their English curriculum at UOH in the context of previous research. It highlighted a significant issue: Most students find the current English syllabus irrelevant, too easy, and not aligned with their medical specialisation, a sentiment echoed by their teachers and their Engl-100 grades. This dissatisfaction contrasts with previous studies in which students and teachers reported positive opinions of their English syllabuses. However, similarly to previous research (e.g., Le et al., 2021; Khalili & Tahririan, 2023; Reynolds et al., 2023; Lodhi et al., 2018; Guan & Scott, 2024; Le et al., 2021), students expressed concerns that the course did not meet their needs. Consequently, students stressed the importance of having more relevant and adequate resources available to prepare them for the communication challenges they would encounter in their medical careers (Guan & Scott, 2024). This highlights the urgent need for a re-evaluation and potential overhaul of the current English syllabus.

The findings highlighted students' dissatisfaction with the English syllabus because they found it too easy for their English proficiency. It has been argued that educational materials often overlook medical students' specific language needs and suggested that English departments should create specialised programmes to enhance interaction skills and overall communication (Sojoodizadeh et al., 2020). However, this presents an opportunity for improvement. Enhancing the motivational environment by focusing on relevance and support could increase students' engagement and motivation. This approach could be more effective than merely simplifying the course (Jones et al., 2022; Reverter et al., 2020). It offers a promising route towards a more effective and engaging English syllabus.

Furthermore, as well as emphasising that the English syllabus should be tailored to students' proficiency levels and medical specialisations, the students stressed the importance of focusing more on speaking skills for practical communication. They proposed holding regular sessions where students discuss medical topics in English to build their

confidence. This finding that medical students need to enhance their speaking skills aligns with previous studies such as those by Alrashed and Abdel Latif (2025), Ani (2024), Tayem et al. (2020), Wahyuni (2021), Kayaoğlu and Dağ Akbaş (2016), Le et al. (2021), and Alhamami and Almelhi (2021), all of which highlighted that students prioritise improving their oral skills. As a result, it was recommended that English departments create specialised programmes to enhance the interaction skills of medical students and tailor them to their needs to better equip students for their medical careers and enable them to communicate successfully in English (Sojoodizadeh et al., 2020).

Continuous evaluation is essential to keep the syllabus relevant to the students. The current research aimed to evaluate the English language textbook in order to improve it to meet students' needs and maintain the quality of the courses taught to students. It is hoped that this will give educators and other people interested in this field insights into students' requirements to provide a more effective and engaging learning environment to help them in their chosen professional path. Therefore, the current study recommended improving the syllabus to meet students' needs by, for instance, raising the course level and revising the content to meet students' needs and help to improve their English proficiency. The potential impact of these recommendations is significant, as they could lead to a substantial improvement in students' English proficiency. The results of this study could also be used to evaluate and improve syllabuses in other departments at UOH and other EFL contexts.

While the study has achieved its objectives, it is essential to note that it also has inherent limitations. The evaluation was based solely on the subjective views of 5 teachers and 44 first-year students from the medical department at the UOH, which may not fully capture all the strengths and weaknesses of the English language curriculum and could affect the findings' broader applicability. Therefore, additional studies with a larger sample of participants are required to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the English language needs of Saudi medical students. Furthermore, more research in other global medical education settings would also be valuable. Future research could integrate various research methods to gain further insights into students' perceptions and suggestions regarding targeted syllabuses to help them achieve their potential. All these research endeavours could help to enhance the development of suitable medical English syllabuses, considering various elements such as students' level of English proficiency and syllabus content to better meet students' needs.

#### REFERENCES

- [1] Alhamami, M. & Almelhi, A. (2021). English or Arabic in Healthcare Education: Perspectives of Healthcare Alumni, Students, and Instructors. *Journal of Multidisciplinary Healthcare*, 2021(14), pp. 2537-2547 <https://doi.org/10.2147/JMDH.S330579>
- [2] Al-Hoorie, A. H., Al-Shahrani, M., Al Shlowiy, A. S., & Mitchell, C. (2021). Preparation of teachers of English as an additional language in Saudi Arabia: Research, policy, curriculum, and practice. In N. Polat, L. Mahalingappa, & H. Kayi-Aydar (Eds.), *Preparation of teachers of English as an additional language (EAL) around the world: Research, policy, curriculum, and practice* (pp. 158–187). Multilingual Matters.
- [3] Allmnakrah, A., & Evers, C. (2020). The need for a fundamental shift in the Saudi education system: Implementing the Saudi Arabian Economic Vision 2030. *Research in Education*, 106(1), pp. 22–40.
- [4] Almoaily, M., & Alnasser, S. M. N. (2019). Current English language policies in Saudi Arabian higher education English departments: A study beyond the domain of the classroom. *Journal of Arts*, 31, pp. 35–47.
- [5] Al-Mutairi, A., & Elsayy, H. E. A. (2021). The perception of English department students and faculty members of online learning during COVID-19: What courses fit better? *Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies*, 17(4), pp. 2235-2254.
- [6] Alnasser, S. M. N. (2022). Exploring EFL instructors' self-derived English language policies at higher education level: A case study in the Saudi context. *Frontiers in Education*, 7, pp. 1–9.
- [7] Alqarni, O., Mahdi, H., Ali, J., & Curle, S. (2024). English Medium Instruction in Saudi Arabia: A Systematic Review. *Language Teaching Research Quarterly*, 42, pp. 21-37. [10.32038/ltrq.2024.42.02](https://doi.org/10.32038/ltrq.2024.42.02).
- [8] Alrashed, M., & Abdel Latif, M. M. M. (2025). Investigating Saudi university medical students' English language difficulties: Needs analysis study. *Frontiers in Medicine*, 11, 1492031. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fmed.2024.1492031>
- [9] Altschuld, J. W., & Austin, M. J. (2006). Program evaluation: Concepts and perspectives. In M. E. Leong & D. Austin (Eds.), *The psychology research handbook* (pp. 75–90). Sage Publications.
- [10] Atai, M. R., & Abbasi, A. (2023). Exploring the EAP Needs of Iranian Students of Medicine. *Taiwan International ESP Journal*, 14(1), pp. 1-30. [https://doi.org/10.6706/TIESPJ.202306\\_14\(1\).0001](https://doi.org/10.6706/TIESPJ.202306_14(1).0001).
- [11] Barnawi, O. Z. (2017). *Neoliberalism and English language education policies in the Arabian Gulf*. Routledge.
- [12] Barnawi, O. Z. (2021a). EMI-cum-acceleration policy in the contemporary transnational HE market: Experiences of Saudi engineering students. *Australian Review of Applied Linguistics*, 44, pp. 208–228.
- [13] Barnawi, O. Z. (2021b). EMI as a performative technology of acceleration in higher education contexts: Academics and administrators' perspectives. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13670050.2021.1954385>.
- [14] Barnawi, O. Z., & Al-Hawsawi, S. (2017). English language education policy in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia: Current trends, issues, and challenges. In R. Kirkpatrick (Ed.), *English language education policy in the Middle East and North Africa* (pp. 199–222). Springer.
- [15] Bloom, B. S., Hastings, J.T., & Madaus, G.F. (1971). *Handbook on Formative and Summative Evaluation of Student Learning*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- [16] Boud, D. (1995). Assessment and learning: Contradictory or complementary? In P. Knight (Ed.), *Assessment for learning in higher education* (pp. 35–48).
- [17] Kogan Page Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), pp. 77–101.

- [18] Chufama, M. (2021). The Pivotal Role of Diagnostic, Formative and Summative Assessment in Higher Education Institutions' Teaching and Student Learning. *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research and Publications*, 4(5), pp. 5–15.
- [19] Collini, S. (2012). *What are universities for?* Penguin.
- [20] De Costa, P. I., Green-Eneix, C. A., & Li, W. (2020). Problematizing EMI language policy in a transnational world: China's entry into the global higher education market. *English Today*, 38, pp. 80–87.
- [21] De Costa, P. I., Green-Eneix, C., & Li, W. (2021). Problematizing language policy and practice in EMI and transnational higher education: Challenges and possibilities. *Australian Review of Applied Linguistics*, 44, pp. 115–128.
- [22] Elyas, T. (2008). The attitude of American English within the Saudi education system. *Novitas-ROYAL (Research on Youth and Language)*, 2(1), 28–48.
- [23] Elyas, T. (2011). *Diverging identity: A contextualized exploration of the interplay of competing discourses in two Saudi university classrooms'* (PhD thesis). University of Adelaide, Adelaide.
- [24] Elyas, T., & Al-Ghamdi, A. A. (2018). A critical positivist analysis of Tatweer policy in Saudi Arabia. In A. W. Wiseman & P. M. Davidson (Eds.), *Cross-nationally comparative, evidence-based educational policy-making and reform* (pp. 241–276). Emerald Publishing Limited.
- [25] Elyas, T., & Badawood, O. (2016). English language educational policy in Saudi Arabia post 21st century: Enacted curriculum, identity, and modernisation: A critical discourse analysis approach. *Fire*, 3, pp. 70–81.
- [26] Elyas, T., & Picard, M. (2010). Saudi Arabian educational history: Impacts on English language teaching. *Education, Business, and Society: Contemporary Middle Eastern Issues*, 3(2), pp. 24–40.
- [27] Elyas, T., & Picard, M. (2013). Critiquing of higher education policy in Saudi Arabia: Towards a new neoliberalism. *Education, Business, and Society: Contemporary Middle Eastern Issues*, 6(1), pp. 31–41.
- [28] Elyas, T., & Picard, M. (2018). A brief history of English in Saudi Arabia. In C. Moskovsky & M. Picard (Eds.), *EFL in Saudi Arabia: New insights into teaching and learning English* (pp. 78–92). Routledge.
- [29] Farea, W. A., & Singh, M. K. M. (2024). A target English needs analysis on ESP course: Exploring medical students' perceptions of necessities at a Yemeni university. *Training, Language and Culture*, 8(1), pp. 20–37.
- [30] Gayessa, T. G., & Mohammed, N. (2024). Assessing health science students' English language lacks: learners' needs analysis. *ELT Forum. Journal of English Language Teaching*, 13(1), pp. 1–15.
- [31] Guan, W., & Scott, T. (2024). An examination of students' perspectives of medical English course quality in Guangdong medical universities. *Teaching and Learning in Medicine*, 1–14. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10401334.2024.2368074>
- [32] Hadi, S. & Zahra, K. (2015). Evaluation of an ESP Medical Textbook: Instructors and Learners' Perceptions in Focus. *International Education Studies*, 8, pp. 97-97. <https://doi.org/10.5539/ies.v8n7p97>.
- [33] Jones, B. D., Miyazaki, Y., Li, M., & Biscotte, S. (2022). Motivational climate predicts student evaluations of teaching: Relationships between students' course perceptions, ease of course, and teaching evaluations. *AERA Open*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/23328584211073167>.
- [34] Kayaoğlu, K. M., & Dağ Akbaş, R. (2016). Designing, developing, and delivering an online medical English course with a focus on ESP and online learning. *Karadeniz Teknik Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi*, 11, 369–387.
- [35] Khalili, S., & Tahririan, M. H. (2023). English for Medical Purposes in Iran: Needs Analysis, Challenges, and Prospects. *Iranian Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, 12(2), pp. 49-68.
- [36] Kirkpatrick, A. (2014). The language (s) of HE: EMI and/or ELF and/or multilingualism? *The Asian Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 1(1), pp. 4–15.
- [37] Le, T. T., Phan, Q. T. N., & Le, M. X. (2021). Medical Students' Evaluation of an English for Specific Purposes Coursebook: A Case in Vietnam. *LET. Linguistics, Literature, and English Teaching Journal*, 11(1), pp. 1–10. <https://doi.org/10.18592/let.v11i2.5032>.
- [38] Le, T. & Tran, T. (2021). English Language Training Curriculum: An Evaluation from Learner's Perceptions. *Open Journal of Social Sciences*, 9, pp. 40–57. <https://doi.org/10.4236/jss.2021.93004>.
- [39] Liu, Z. (2012). The four-stage evaluation model for the construction of excellent quality online courses. *International Journal of Continuing Engineering Education and Life-Long Learning*, 22(1/2), p. 49. <https://doi.org/10.1504/ijceell.2012.047048>.
- [40] Lodhi, M. A., Shamim, M., Robab, M., Shahzad, S., & Ashraf, A. (2018). English for doctors: An ESP approach to needs analysis and course design for medical students. *International Journal of English Linguistics*, 8(5), pp. 205–214.
- [41] Meddour, M. (2015). Web-Based English for Computer Science: Students' Evaluation of Course Effectiveness. *Arab World English Journal (AWEJ)*, 6(3), pp. 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2834728>.
- [42] Mohamed, O. I., Aljadaan, O., & Al-Ani, N. N. (2024). Needs analysis of English for specific purposes for health sciences students: a cross-sectional study at a university in the UAE. *Journal of Language Teaching & Research*, 15(5).
- [43] Patton, M. Q. (2008). *Utilization-focused evaluation* (4th Ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- [44] Phan, L. H., & Barnawi, O. Z. (2015). Where English, neoliberalism, desire, and internationalization are alive and kicking: Higher education in Saudi Arabia today. *Language and Education*, 29, pp. 545–565.
- [45] Qadeer, A., & Chow, U.T.C. (2023). English language difficulties of pre-clinical medical students and the contributing role of foundation-year English language course at a medical college in Saudi Arabia. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 13, pp. 1360–72. doi: 10.17507/tpls.1306.04.
- [46] Reverter, A., Martinez, C., Currey, P., Bommel, S., & Hudson, N. (2020). Unraveling student evaluations of courses and teachers. *Cogent Education*, 7(1), pp. 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2020.1771830>
- [47] Reynolds, B., Zhang, X., & Ding, C. (2023). A mixed-methods study of English vocabulary for medical purposes: Medical students' needs, difficulties, and strategies. *Applied Linguistics Review*, 14(3), pp. 643–678. <https://doi.org/10.1515/applrev-2020-0119>.
- [48] Rossi, P. H., Lipsey, M. W., & Freeman, H. E. (2004). *Evaluation: A systematic approach* (7th Ed.). Sage Publications.
- [49] Sabbour, S. M., Dewedar, S. A., & Kandil, S. K. (2010). Language barriers in medical education and attitudes towards Arabization of medicine: student and staff perspectives. *EMHJ-Eastern Mediterranean Health Journal*, 16(12), pp. 1263-1271.

- [50] Sadeghi, B., Kashanian, N.M., Maleki, A., & Haghdooost, A. (2013). English language proficiency as a predictor of academic achievement among medical students in Iran. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 3, pp. 2315–21. doi: 10.4304/tpls.3.12.2315-2321.
- [51] Salehi, H. & Khadivar, Z., (2015). Evaluation of an ESP Medical Textbook: Instructors and Learners' Perceptions in Focus. *International Education Studies*, 8(7), pp. 97-97. <https://doi.org/10.5539/ies.v8n7p97>
- [52] Scriven, M. (1991). *Evaluation Thesaurus* (4th Ed.). Sage Publications.
- [53] Sojoodizadeh, R., Ahangari, S., & Sheykhsharan, E. (2020). Evaluating Tabriz medical students' expectations of learning English for specific purposes (ESP): A focus on gender and subject field. *Research and Development in Medical Education*, 9, p. 5. <https://doi.org/10.34172/rdme.2020.005>
- [54] Steyn, C., Davies, C., & Sambo, A. (2018). Eliciting student feedback for course development: Applying a qualitative course evaluation tool among business research students. *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education*, 44(1), pp. 11–24. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02602938.2018.1466266>
- [55] Stufflebeam, D. L., & Shinkfield, A. J. (2007). *Evaluation theory, models, and applications*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- [56] Tayem, Y., Al Shammari, A., Albalawi, N., & Shareef, M. (2020). Language barriers to studying medicine in English: Perceptions of final-year medical students at the Arabian Gulf University. *Eastern Mediterranean Health Journal*, 26(2), pp. 233–238.
- [57] Tsou, W., & Kao, S. M. (2017). Overview of EMI development. In W. Tsou & S. M. Kao (Eds.), *English as a medium of instruction in higher education: Implementations and classroom practices in Taiwan* (pp. 3–18). Springer.
- [58] Usman, E., & Anwar, D. (2021). Evaluation of English syllabus for specific purposes for nursing students. *Atlantis Press*. <https://doi.org/10.2991/assehr.k.210914.044>
- [59] Wahyuni, S. (2021). English Language Needs for Medical Students: A Link and Match of Academic and Professional Career. English Franca. *Academic Journal of English Language and Education*, 5(1), pp. 169–184. <https://doi.org/10.29240/ef.v5i1.2146>.
- [60] Willig, C., & Rogers, W. S. (2017). *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research in Psychology*. SAGE Publications.

**Eman Matar M. Alshammari** is an Assistant Professor in Applied Linguistics at the UOH in, Hail, Saudi Arabia, Faculty of Arts and Literature. Her research interest includes learning and teaching evaluation, language testing, second language acquisition, and oral corrective feedback.