

# 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

Abdul Qadeer

Faculty of Languages and Linguistics, Universiti Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia;  
Faculty of Languages and Translation, King Khalid University, Al-Fara'a Campus, Abha, Saudi Arabia

Ung T'chiang Chow\*

Faculty of Languages and Linguistics, Universiti Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

**Abstract**—The study investigates the pre-clinical medical students' perceptions about their English language difficulties and lack at King Khalid University in Saudi Arabia. The Saudi medical students study an English language course at the pre-university level (Foundation Year) to train and prepare for their future extensive medical study in medical college. The English language program comprises reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills and targets enhancing students' language skills. The study aims: (a) to examine the pre-clinical medical students' level of difficulties related to their listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills. (b) To determine the pre-medical students' language lacks and the students' general proficiency. A mixed-method approach, including quantitative and qualitative research methods was used. Data from questionnaires of 67 pre-clinical medical students has been used with representative interviews from the faculty members teaching pre-clinical subjects in the medical college. The findings revealed that the students experience significant difficulties in the use of English language skills, and the skill-wise average is worth considering such as writing (27.95%), reading (25.36%), speaking (24.86%), and listening (12.73%). The findings indicated that writing skills were the most difficult among all the language skills for pre-clinical medical students. Finally, the recommendations were made to revise the English language course, improve the teaching methodology, and address the students' insufficient English language proficiency.

**Index Terms**—English language difficulties and lacks, foundation year English language course, perceptions, pre-clinical medical study

## I. INTRODUCTION

In Saudi Arabia, English is used as a second language with a strong influence on the first language; it is most likely that the learners experience deficiencies in the effective use of English and consequently face challenges to continuing their education in the English language.

The role and significance of the English Language for medical studies cannot be diminished because all medical students are in dire need of learning English. The students at a university in Saudi Arabia study English as an intensive language course for medical purposes before entering medical college. However, they still experience various language difficulties in using English for academic and occupational purposes though they have obtained good grades in their English language course. The students' deficiency indicates that there should be more emphasis on learning English and improving their proficiency in language skills.

The study by Kaliyadan et al. (2015) stated that Saudi medical students in their preparatory year (foundation year) course face difficulties in almost all types of English language usage in pursuing their medical studies. Almoallim et al. (2010), carried out a study at Umm-ul-Qura University in Saudi Arabia, found that a lack of proficiency in the English language was one of the main difficulties faced by Saudi medical students during the first year of their study. Vahdany and Gerivani (2016) emphasized that English reading skill is very much needed in the medical field. The students need to understand the medical text and complicated terminology in English. They also need to improve their English language skills because they require a high level of English proficiency to succeed in their medical careers. Almoallim et al. (2010) advocated that the immediate relevance of an educational program to its learners' needs and interests has been the main concern for curriculum designers. Lack of interest in the curriculum primarily increases stress levels among the students, and such typical problems ultimately lead to the students' low proficiency. The measures to

---

\* Corresponding Author

enhance language learning motivation should be based on the concerned students' needs and can increase their participation.

The study aims to trace Saudi pre-clinical medical students' English language lacks and difficulties. It also aims to explore the students' perceptions of the English language program at King Khalid University in Saudi Arabia so that future challenges and deficiencies may be overcome. To achieve these aims the following research objectives have been allocated.

1. To explore pre-clinical medical students' perceptions of the English language program at the Foundation-Year level.
2. To know pre-clinical medical students' difficulties in using English language skills.
3. To determine pre-clinical medical students' English language proficiency.

The following questions cover the research objectives of this study:

1. How effectively is the English language program in improving pre-clinical medical students' medical study?
2. What is the difficulty level of pre-clinical medical students in using English language skills at medical college?
3. What is the level of proficiency of pre-clinical medical students in using English language skills at medical college?

It is perceived that the study will be significant in helping to analyze pre-clinical medical students' English language difficulties which in turn will help infer their future professional challenges and prospective competency.

The research outcome can give an insight into the pre-clinical medical students' weaknesses and difficulties regarding listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills in Saudi Arabia. The findings can presumably provide a guideline for improving the English language program. The study will increase students' understanding of their English language difficulties and awareness of their lack. Similarly, the study will help analyze the students' perceptions and understanding of their English language program.

The study can be equally beneficial to all the stakeholders, such as curriculum developers, faculty members, and the decision-makers who can do the necessary planning to meet the needs.

There are a few limitations related to some cultural constraints. The study focuses only on male students' English language difficulties in writing, reading, speaking, and listening skills. Due to social constraints and restrictions, female faculty members and students have been excluded from this study.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

English language learning and teaching is a challenging task in Saudi Arabia. Alrabai (2016) stated that there are many factors for Saudi learners' low English language competency. The interrelated causes are socio-cultural variables (*the influence of LI, society, culture, and religion*), learner-related variables (*gender, motivation, and anxiety*), the variables of EFL instructions (*teacher behavior, and practices, the curriculum, and the teaching methods*), and other factors concerning the problems with the education system in Saudi Arabia (*overcrowded classes, lack of teacher training, and lack of technology*) may also contribute poor EFL results.

Almoallim et al. (2010) highlighted the issue of Saudi first-year medical students' academic difficulties. According to them, the English language was placed first in difficulty by women medical students (mean rank of 4.09) and second by men students—the work of Haq (1982), endorsed by Mohammad and Hazarika (2016), also concluded that most Arab students commonly experience problems with writing skills. Haq (1982) argued that most responsible university officials and English language instructors are concerned about students' gradual deterioration of the English language standard. It has been noted practically by the researcher, being a faculty member at a Saudi university, that the students have a deficiency in the usage of syntax and spelling rules. They face communication difficulties, and the students' weakness is due to their inadequate acquaintance with the English language when they enter the university. The problems of English language acquisition in Saudi Arabia include mother tongue interference and resistance to learning other languages. They are seen as the agent of cultural dilution, and the English language teachers are generally not adequately trained in linguistics. The curriculum and syllabi are not revised as per students' needs, and the methods of teaching English are outmoded.

Medical students' conditions are not very different from those of other disciplines. The study by Gaffas (2016) attempted to articulate medical students' perspectives on the impact of English for General Purposes (EGP) and English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses on the development of their proficiency in the use of the English language. The study emphasized using the English mode of instruction for teaching medical courses.

The study of Alharby (2005) investigated the languages used in medical workplaces. The findings indicated that productive skills (writing and speaking) were perceived as less critical than receptive skills (listening and reading). The study concluded that the English language courses were inappropriate in terms of English language use in hospitals.

Kaliyadan et al. (2015) supported a mismatch between stakeholders' expectations and the existing ground reality regarding the student's English language proficiency. There is a gap between the student's actual learning needs and the present English language course.

Considering the various challenges Saudi students face in learning the English language, the study investigates pre-clinical medical students' self-reported perceptions about their difficulties concerning reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills. The study also determines students' perceptions about their previous foundation year English language course and awareness of their present specific English language lacks. A general survey of the literature has indicated

that no significant attempt has been made to explore the levels of difficulties among the pre-clinical medical students from the first to third years of medical study at a medical college at King Khalid University.

### III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study used a mixed-method approach (qualitative and quantitative) for the data collection procedure. The study investigated the Saudi pre-clinical medical students' perceptions about their English language learning in terms of their language deficiency and level of difficulty, as well as their feedback about the foundation year English Language course at a medical college in King Khalid University. The scope of the study included receptive and productive English language skills with an emphasis on the student's awareness of their present language deficiencies and the appropriateness of their English language course.

The study design has qualitative and quantitative aspects. It focuses on three main parts related to the Saudi pre-clinical medical students' English language learning: (a) feedback about the appropriateness of the Foundation Year English course, the student's language learning deficiencies, and the level of their English language difficulties.

The feedback related to the student's learning about many students' specific listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills will be examined, and the outcome will be analyzed. Moreover, the following given components describe the research design further.

#### A. Pre-Clinical Medical Students

The participants of this study are Saudi pre-clinical medical students in the first to third years of the College of Medicine at King Khalid University in Saudi Arabia with majors in Biochemistry, Physiology, and Anatomy. The students at medical colleges do not study English. However, the pre-medical students studied English as an Intensive English language course in their first semester at the foundation year level before entering medical college. The pre-medical students were taught listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills. In addition, they were taught to write paragraphs of 80 to 100 words and how to make editing by focusing on the capitalization and punctuation of a given paragraph. A sample of 67 pre-clinical students was taken to analyze their perceptions of their language learning lacks and the level of difficulties as well as their perceptions about the foundation year English language course. All the participants were similar in terms of their qualifications, background, and socioeconomic status.

#### B. Subject-Specialist Faculty Members (Pre-Clinical)

The faculty members who were teaching pre-clinical medical subjects such as Biochemistry, Physiology, and Anatomy were chosen randomly to give feedback in the recorded interviews about the students' English language proficiency.

The questionnaire was designed and administered to get the pre-clinical medical students' feedback related to (a) the Foundation Year English language course, (b) Students' English language learning lacks, and (c) Students' feedback about their level of difficulties. The semi-structured interviews with representative subject-specialist faculty members teaching pre-clinical medical subjects from first to third years in the medical college were also conducted.

### IV. DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

A sample of 67 students' questionnaires was administered. The students were free to ignore or fill in the questionnaire according to their preference. All the necessary explanations/clarifications concerning the questionnaire items were made to increase the student's understanding by the researcher before administering the questionnaire.

The rationale for taking the sample of the pre-clinical medical students is that they have recently completed their foundation year English language course and were experiencing various English language difficulties in their first phase (pre-clinical) medical study in the medical college. The interview respondents (Subject-specialist faculty members) were chosen randomly to get their feedback. They were significant in giving first-hand information about the pre-clinical medical students' language and difficulties.

The respondents' responses were counted and put in categories to convert into empirical data, such as the total number of frequencies, percentages, and mean of the concerned items for analyzing the necessary findings. The medical teachers' interview feedback was recorded and converted into an empirical form for analyzing and supporting the data acquired from the participating students to establish the necessary findings of the study. An average-based outcome was made after classifying students' empirical feedback to find the variance. The findings are reported in tables and charts for further interpretation.

#### A. Questions 1 to 5 Cover the RQ.1 and the Data Analysis

Research Objective-1 (RO.1)

*To determine pre-clinical medical students' perceptions about their previous Foundation-Year English language course to enhance their medical study.*

Research Question-1 (RQ.1)

*How effective is the Foundation-Year English language course in improving pre-clinical medical students' study in medical college?*

1. How many semesters should the Foundation-Year English language course be allocated?

TABLE 1  
SEMESTERS FOR THE FOUNDATION-YEAR ENGLISH LANGUAGE COURSE

1 Semester		2 Semesters		3 Semesters		Total	
n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
15	22.39	40	59.70	12	17.91	67	100

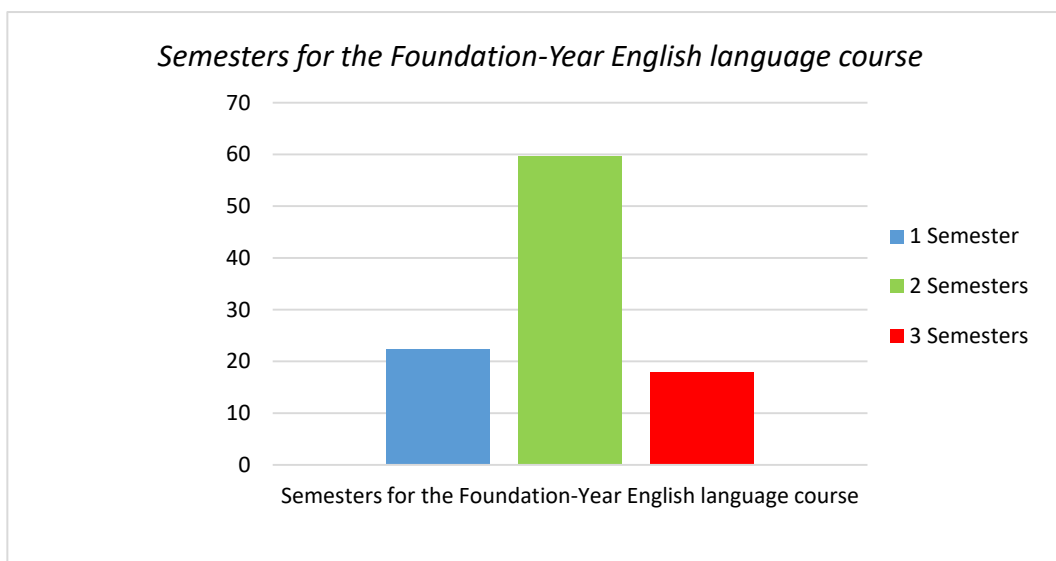


Figure 1. Semesters for the Foundation-Year English Language Course

2. In the Foundation-Year 2<sup>nd</sup> Semester, basic science subjects should be taught in English.

TABLE 2  
LANGUAGE OF INSTRUCTIONS FOR BASIC SCIENCE SUBJECTS IN FOUNDATION-YEAR 2<sup>ND</sup> SEMESTER

Agree		Neither Agree nor Disagree		Disagree		Total	
n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
57	85.06	3	4.5	7	10.44	67	100

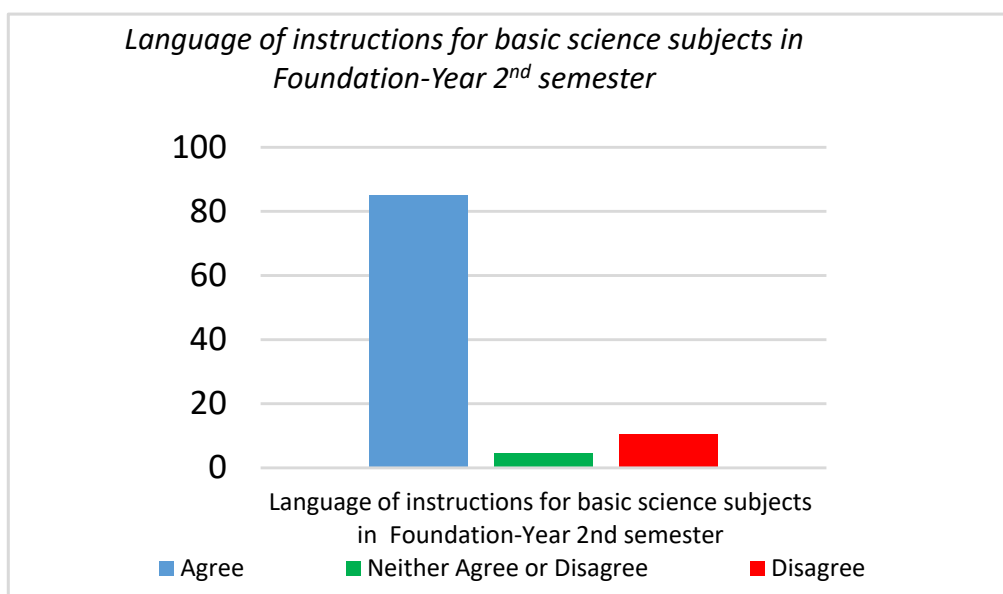


Figure 2. Language of Instructions for Basic Science Subjects in Foundation-Year 2<sup>nd</sup> Semester

3. Foundation-Year English course content should be based on the following:

TABLE 3  
COURSE CONTENT IN FOUNDATION-YEAR ENGLISH

<i>English for General Purposes (EGP)</i>		<i>English for Academic Purposes (EAP)</i>		<i>English for Medical Purposes (EMP)</i>		<i>Total</i>	
n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
23	34.32	8	11.94	36	53.74	67	100

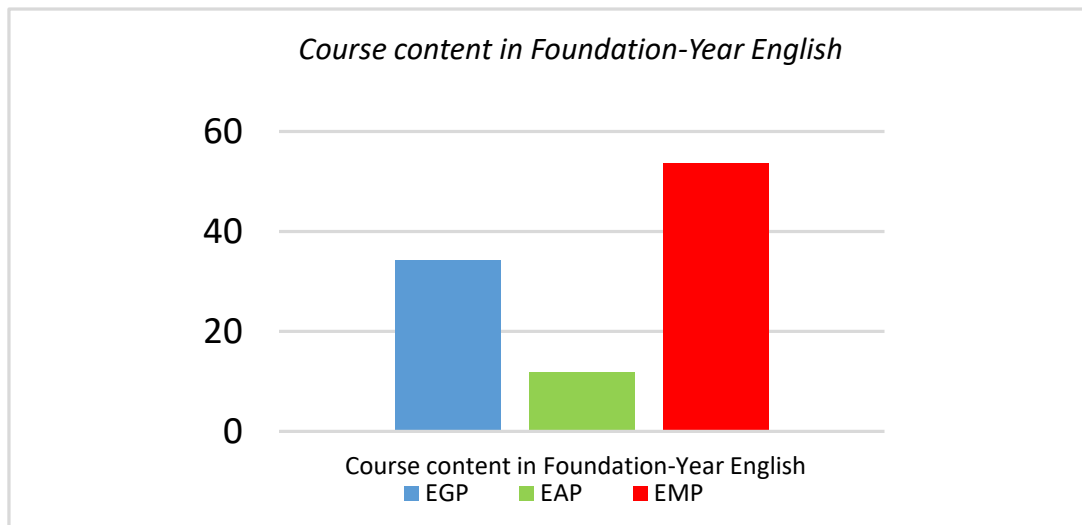


Figure 3. Course Content in Foundation-Year English

4. How do you rate the Foundation-Year English course helping with academic/pre-clinical studies in medical college?

TABLE 4  
CONTRIBUTION OF FOUNDATION-YEAR ENGLISH COURSE IN IMPROVING THE STUDENTS' PRE-CLINICAL STUDIES IN MEDICAL COLLEGE

<i>Poor</i>		<i>Fair</i>		<i>Good</i>		<i>Total</i>	
n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
38	56.73	22	32.83	7	10.44	67	100

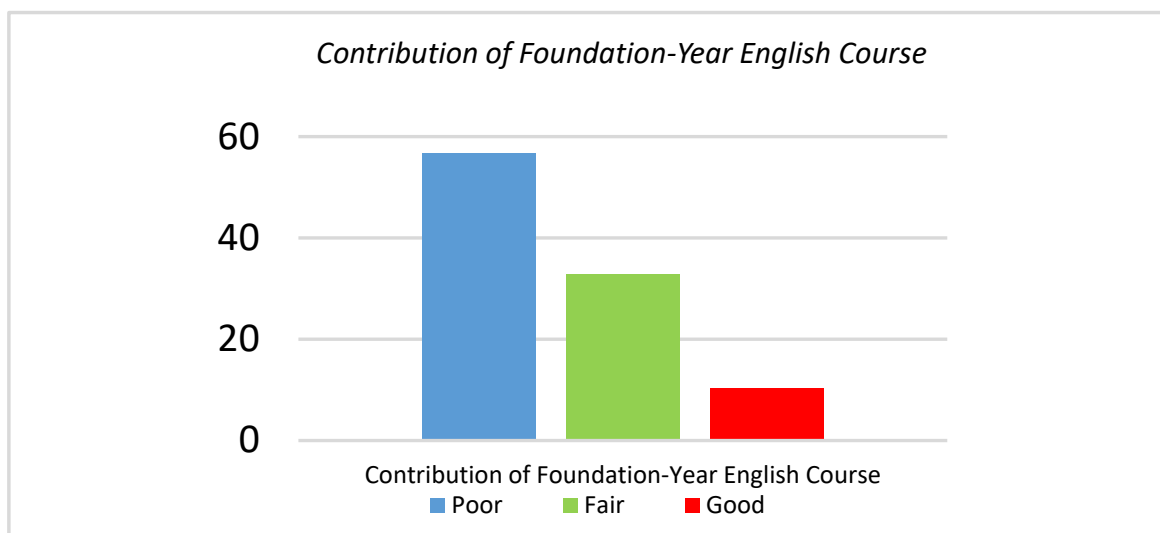


Figure 4. Contribution of Foundation-Year English Course in Improving the Students' Pre-clinical Studies in Medical College

5. In your opinion, which skills of the Foundation-Year English course helped to improve your academic /pre-clinical study in medical college?

TABLE 5  
SKILLS OF THE FOUNDATION-YEAR ENGLISH COURSE, WHICH HELPED TO IMPROVE PRE-CLINICAL STUDY IN MEDICAL COLLEGE

<i>Skill</i>	<i>Extremely</i>		<i>Moderately</i>		<i>Not at all</i>		<i>Total</i>	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
a. Listening	33	49.25	31	46.26	3	4.49	67	100
b. Speaking	22	32.83	39	58.20	6	8.97	67	100
c. Reading	34	50.74	32	47.76	1	1.49	67	100
d. Writing	27	40.29	25	37.31	6	8.95	67	100

### Analysis

The pre-clinical students were requested to give their feedback about the appropriateness of the Foundation-Year English language course.

1. The outcomes indicated that the mainstream of the pre-clinical medical students (59%) preferred to have two semesters. For the possible options of 1 and 3 semesters, the acquired feedback in percentages remained lower, with 22.39% and 17.91%, respectively. The subject-specialist faculty members also preferred to increase the number of semesters.

2. The highest number of students (85.06%) gave their preference to teach basic science subjects in English in the Foundation-Year second semester. However, 10.44% of students disagreed with having English as the language of instruction, and only 4.5% of students neither agreed nor disagreed, considering English as a language of teaching for the basic science subjects in the 2<sup>nd</sup> semester of the Foundation-Year course. The subject-specialist faculty members also suggested learning/teaching basic science subjects in English. According to them, in this way, the students can learn science terms in English.

3. The pre-clinical students highlighted their preference, with a maximum of 53.74% for having English language content related to medical purposes. The student's preferences, such as English for General Purposes (EGP) and English for Academic Purposes (EAP), remained very low at 34.32% and 11.94%, respectively. The subject-specialist faculty members also emphasized teaching medical-related English language content.

4. Many of the students (56.73%) showed dissatisfaction regarding the appropriateness of the course and placed it in the category of 'Poor.' On the other hand, for the 'good' and 'Fair' categories, the acquired percentage remained low, i.e., at 10.44% and 32%, respectively. Similarly, the subject-specialist faculty members recommended improving the foundation year English language course.

5. The pre-clinical medical students revealed that the most helpful English Language skill was 'reading,' with 98.51% of students considering it extremely or moderately helpful in improving their language. The second most helpful skill was listening, with 95.51%, followed by writing and speaking, with almost identical values of 91.05% and 91.03%, respectively. Likewise, the subject-specialist faculty members considered all the language skills essential to learning by the students, but they emphasized more in writing and reading skills.

### B. Questions 6 to 9 Cover the RQ.2 and the Data Analysis

#### Research Objective-1 (RO.1)

To determine pre-clinical medical students' perceptions about their previous Foundation Year English language course to enhance their medical study.

#### Research Question-1 (RQ.1)

How effective is the Foundation-Year English language course in improving pre-clinical medical students' study in medical college?

6. Level of difficulty in academic English-speaking skills.

TABLE 6  
LEVEL OF DIFFICULTY IN ACADEMIC ENGLISH-SPEAKING SKILLS

	Easy		Neutral		Difficult		Total	
	N	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Speaking from notes	32	47.76	29	43.28	6	8.96	67	100
Asking questions	32	47.76	19	28.35	16	23.89	67	100
Participating effectively in discussion	20	29.86	26	38.80	21	31.34	67	100
Presenting ideas/information	26	38.80	22	32.85	19	28.35	67	100
Answering questions	23	34.33	32	47.76	12	17.91	67	100
Communicating ideas confidently	22	32.85	26	38.80	19	28.35	67	100
Speaking clearly (pronunciation)	24	35.82	25	37.31	18	26.87	67	100
Speaking accurately (grammar)	20	29.86	24	35.82	23	34.32	67	100
Speaking with a wide range of vocabulary/medical terms	23	34.32	28	41.80	16	23.88	67	100

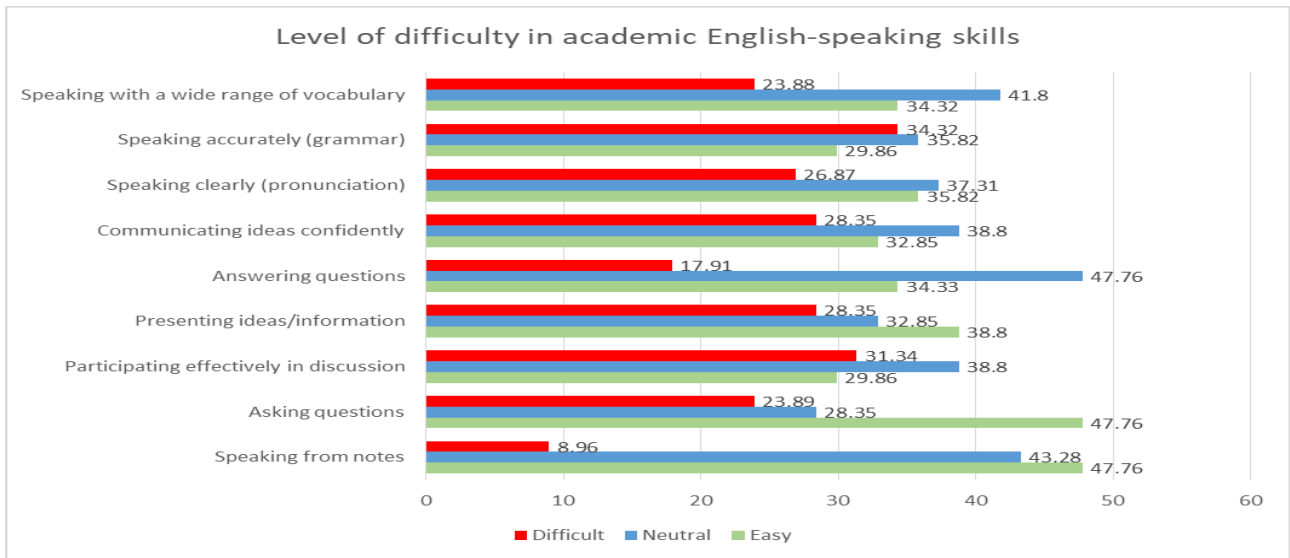


Figure 5. Level of Difficulty in Academic English-speaking Skills

7. Level of difficulty in academic English-listening skills.

TABLE 7  
LEVEL OF DIFFICULTY IN ACADEMIC ENGLISH-LISTENING SKILLS

	Easy		Neutral		Difficult		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Understanding vocabulary/medical terms	26	38.80	26	38.80	15	22.40	67	100
Recognizing supporting ideas/examples	31	46.26	22	32.83	14	20.90	67	100
Following a discussion	32	47.77	26	38.80	9	13.43	67	100
Identifying different views/ ideas	35	52.25	21	31.34	11	16.41	67	100
Understanding lecturers' accent	30	44.77	24	35.83	13	19.40	67	100
Taking brief, clear notes	30	44.77	26	38.80	11	16.41	67	100
Understanding the organization of lectures	24	35.83	28	41.79	15	22.38	67	100
Understanding the main ideas of lectures	31	46.26	26	38.82	10	14.92	67	100
Understanding questions	34	50.74	24	35.83	9	13.43	67	100
Understanding classmates when they speak English	38	56.71	22	32.85	7	10.44	67	100

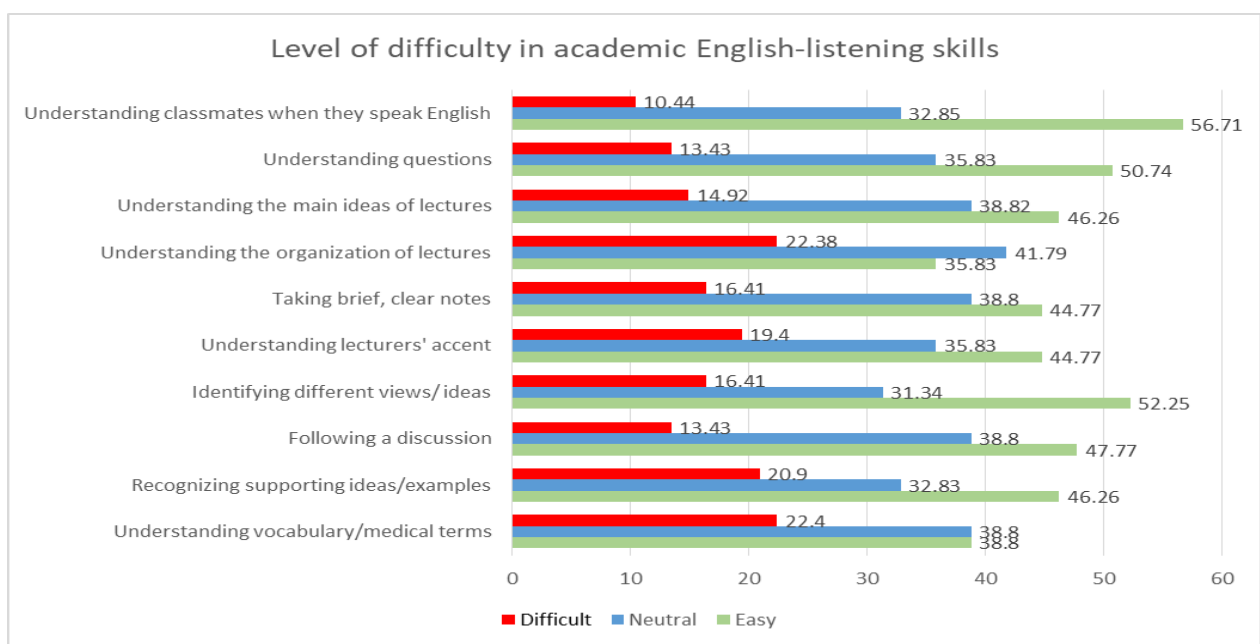


Figure 6. Level of Difficulty in Academic English-listening Skills

8. Level of difficulty in academic English- reading skills.

TABLE 8  
LEVEL OF DIFFICULTY IN ACADEMIC ENGLISH-READING SKILLS

	Easy		Neutral		Difficult		Total	
	N	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Reading to develop in-depth critical understanding of the medical textbooks	18	26.87	21	31.34	28	41.79	67	100
Reading reports	18	26.87	28	41.79	21	31.34	67	100
Reading for the main information in a text	23	34.32	28	41.79	16	23.89	67	100
Reading quickly through a text to get a general view of the content	25	37.31	23	34.32	19	28.35	67	100
Using a dictionary to find meanings of new words	22	32.85	26	38.80	19	28.35	67	100
Using a wide range of vocabulary/medical terms	24	35.82	25	37.31	18	26.87	67	100

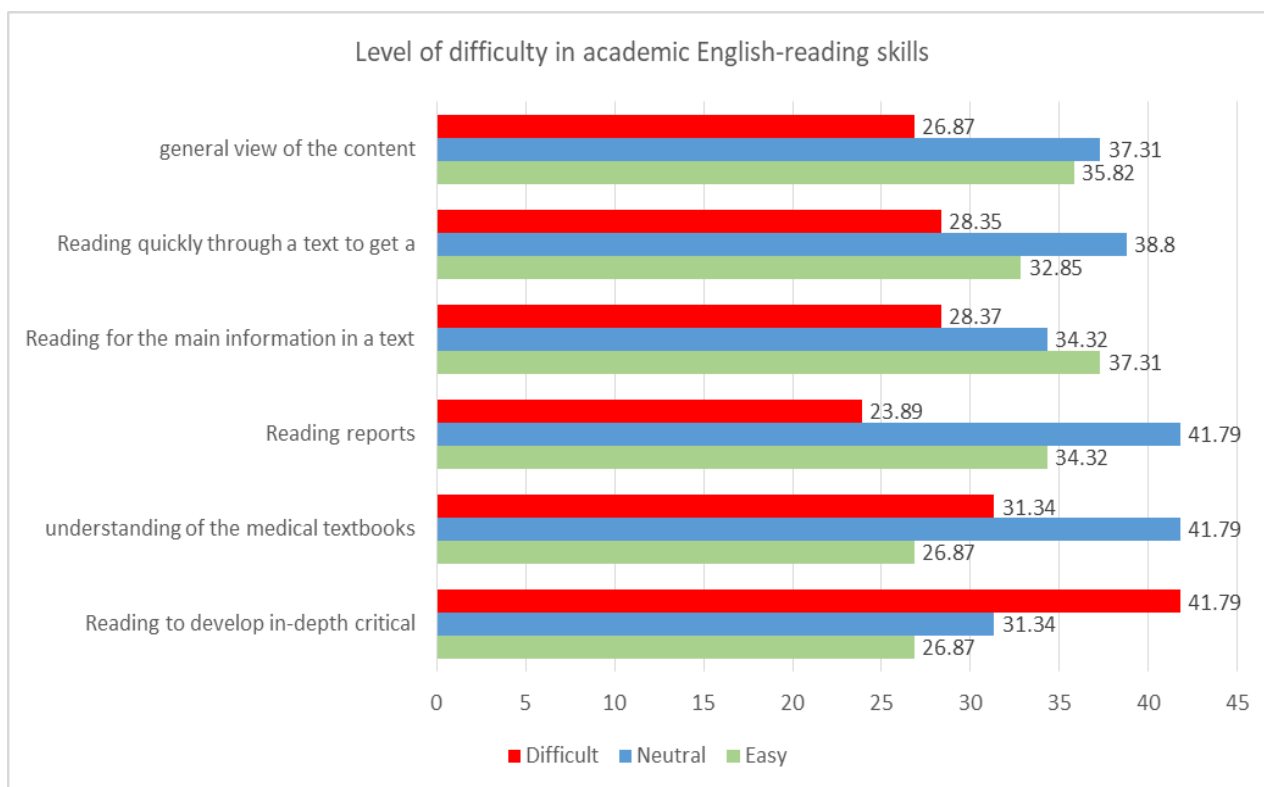


Figure 7. Level of Difficulty in Academic English-reading Skills

9. Level of difficulty in academic English- writing skills.

TABLE 9  
LEVEL OF DIFFICULTY IN ACADEMIC ENGLISH- WRITING SKILLS

	Easy		Neutral		Difficult		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Writing report	23	34.32	24	35.83	20	29.85	67	100
Writing summaries	23	34.32	27	40.30	17	25.38	67	100
Writing assignments	22	32.83	28	41.79	17	25.38	67	100
Expressing ideas	24	35.82	26	38.80	17	25.38	67	100
Organizing ideas in logical sequences	17	25.38	30	44.77	20	29.85	67	100
Writing brief, clear notes	24	35.82	29	43.28	14	20.90	67	100
Structure of writing as a whole	22	32.84	27	40.30	18	26.86	67	100
Giving written explanations about graphs, tables, charts, and diagrams	20	29.85	26	38.80	21	31.35	67	100
Writing accurately (grammar)	20	29.85	23	34.32	24	35.83	67	100

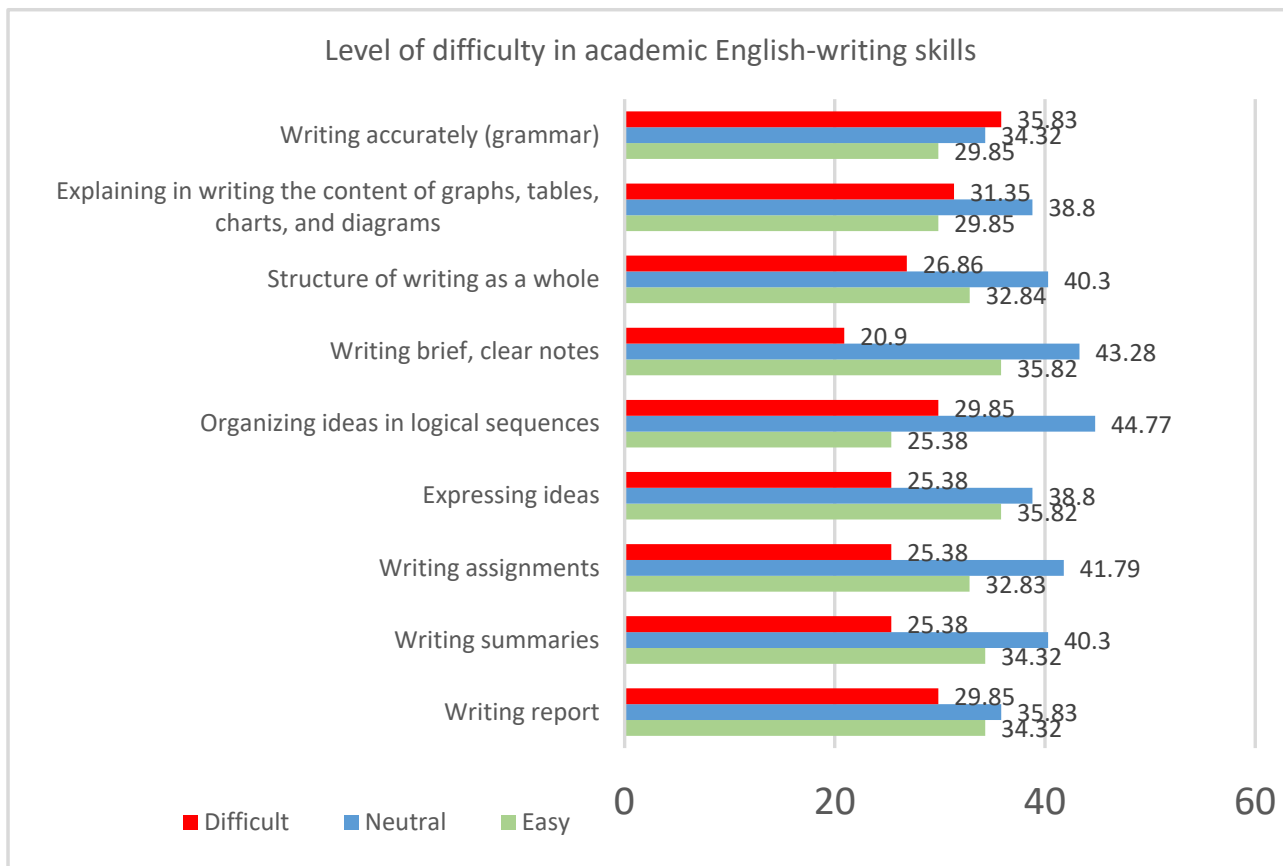


Figure 8. Level of Difficulty in Academic English-Writing Skills

### Analysis

#### 1. Speaking skills

The pre-clinical medical students highlighted those English-speaking skills such as 'speaking from notes' (47.76%), 'asking questions' (47.76%), and 'presenting ideas/information' (38.80%) remained very easy to use for students. However, for the skills like 'participating effectively in discussion' (38.80%), 'answering questions' (47.76%), 'communicating ideas confidently' (38.80%), 'speaking clearly /pronunciation'(37.31%), and 'speaking accurately' (35.82%), 'speaking with a wide range of vocabulary / medical terms' (41.80%), the respondents gave a mixed kind of feedback indicating that they do not find these skills easy or difficult as the acquired empirical data showed the category of 'Neutral'. However, to determine the level, the students did not show serious concern, which helped to infer that they did not face severe difficulty in using their speaking skills as the percentage acquired remained comparatively low.

#### 2. Listening skills

The pre-clinical medical students revealed that listening skills like 'recognizing supporting ideas/examples' (46.26%), 'following a discussion(47.77%)', 'identifying different views/ ideas' (52.25%), 'understanding lecturers' accents' (44.77%), 'taking a brief, clear notes' (44.77%), 'understanding the main ideas of lectures' (46.26%), 'understanding questions' ( 50.74%), 'understanding classmates when they speak English' ( 56.71%) were easy for them as the acquired percentage of these skills remained comparatively higher. However, the students placed 'understanding of the organization of lectures with 41.79% in the 'Neutral category'. Similarly, the acquired percentage of the students' difficulties in listening skills remained low, indicating no severe concern for the students.

#### 3. Reading skills

The respondents gave mixed feedback about their reading skills, such as 'reading reports' (41.79%), 'reading for the main information in a text (41.79%)', 'using a dictionary to find meanings of new words ' (38.80%), 'using a wide range of vocabulary/medical terms'(37.31%), by considering them neither difficult nor easy and place them in the category of 'Neutral'. On the other hand, the students considered 'reading to develop an in-depth critical understanding of the medical textbooks'(41.79%) difficultly. Similarly, the respondents considered 'reading quickly through a text to get a general view of the content' easy to use.

#### 4. Writing skills

The pre-clinical medical students considered that writing skills like 'writing reports' (35.83%), 'writing summaries' (40.30%), 'writing assignments (41.79%)', 'expressing ideas' (38.80%), 'organizing ideas in logical sequences'(44.77%), 'writing brief, clear notes'(43.28%), 'the structure of writing as a whole (40.30%)', 'giving written explanation about graphs, tables, charts, and diagrams (38.80%) and 'writing with accuracy'(34.32%) were neither difficult nor easy to use.

The subject-specialist faculty members suggested improving all the language skills equally because they considered that the students have plenty of deficiencies in the use of the English language.

C. Questions 10 to 12 Cover the RQ.3 and the Data Analysis

Research Objective-3 (RO.3)

To determine pre-clinical medical students' English language proficiency.

Research Question-3 (RQ.3)

What is the level of proficiency of pre-clinical medical students in using English language skills in medical college?

10. How do you rate your present overall level of English language proficiency?

TABLE 10  
THE OVERALL LEVEL OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY

Poor		Fair		Good		Total	
n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
15	22.38	33	49.25	19	28.37	67	100

11. Estimate your proficiency level in the English language at the time you entered medical college.

TABLE 11  
ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY LEVEL AT THE TIME OF ENTRY INTO MEDICAL COLLEGE

	Bad		Moderate		Good		Total	
	N	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Writing	17	25.37	39	58.22	11	16.41	67	100
Reading	14	20.90	38	56.71	15	22.39	67	100
Listening	12	17.91	38	56.71	17	25.38	67	100
Speaking	20	29.86	38	56.71	9	13.43	67	100

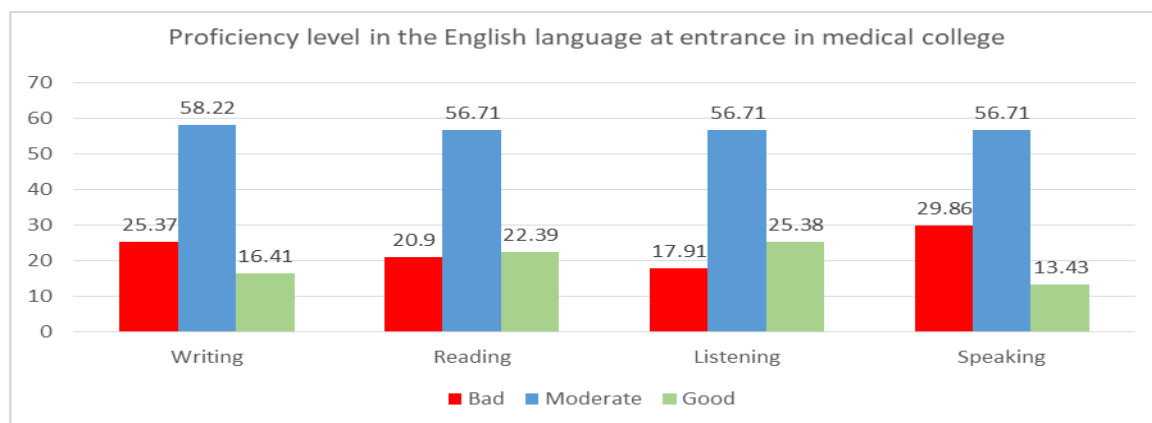


Figure 9. English Language Proficiency Level at the Time of Entry Into Medical College

12. Estimate your Present English Language Proficiency.

TABLE 12  
PRE-CLINICAL MEDICAL STUDENTS PRESENT ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY

	Bad		Moderate		Good		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Writing	4	5.98	45	67.16	18	26.86	67	100
Reading	4	5.98	37	55.22	26	38.80	67	100
Listening	3	2.98	45	67.16	19	28.35	67	100
Speaking	10	14.92	43	64.17	14	20.91	67	100

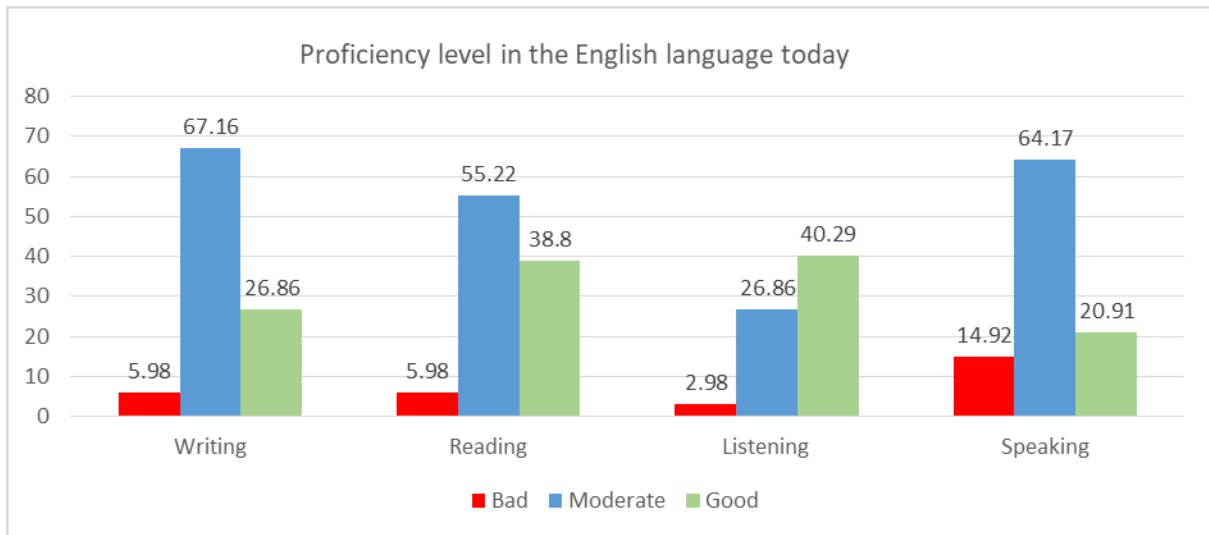


Figure 10. Pre-Clinical Medical Students Present English Language Proficiency

### Analysis

1. The empirical data indicated that the highest number of pre-clinical medical students (49.25%) agreed the current overall English language proficiency level is at the 'Fair' level. It can infer that the student's overall English language proficiency is not satisfactory in terms of their academic needs for medical purposes.

2. The pre-clinical medical students gave their feedback that at the time they entered medical college, their English language proficiency level was at 'Moderate level' and the acquired percentages in different skills are writing (58.22%), reading (56.71%), listening (56.71%) and speaking (56.71%).

3. The acquired feedback revealed that the highest number of pre-clinical medical students consider their overall English language proficiency level is at a 'Moderate' level with a particular skill. They are writing (67.16%), reading (55.22%), listening (67.16%) and speaking (64.17%).

The subject-specialist faculty members rate the pre-clinical medical students' English language proficiency level is in the categories between 'Poor / Fair' and emphasized taking necessary steps for further improvements.

## V. DISCUSSION

A. The pre-clinical medical students' perceptions of the Foundation-Year English language course are significant. According to the feedback, most (59.70%) students were willing to allocate at least two semesters for the English language course for language enhancement at the pre-university (foundation level). The students have also shown their preference (85.06%) of learning the subjects of basic sciences such as chemistry, physics, and biology in English. Concerning the student's preference that their Foundation-Year English language course content should be based on English for Medical Purposes (EMP) or English for General purposes (EGP), most of the students (53.74%) preferred that the Foundation-Year English language course content should be based on English for Medical Purposes (EMP). Moreover, it is quite interesting to find that, on the one hand, the pre-clinical medical students indicated an overall negative tendency (more than fifty percent, e.g., 56.73%) in perceiving that their Foundation-Year English language course did not seem helpful to improve their medical study in medical college. On the other hand, they proclaimed that the reading and listening skills learned at the Foundation-Year level helped improve their pre-clinical medical study by 50.74% and 49.25%, respectively. The speaking skill remained at the lowest in improving their medical study, with 58.20% demonstrating a comparatively negative or less effective tendency. Finally, the students uttered their mixed perceptions about their writing skills. Only 40.29 % of students were optimistic that the Foundation-Year English language course helped them improve their writing skills, but 37.31% of students showed a negative tendency by perceiving that the Foundation-Year English language course did not improve their writing skills for their pre-clinical medical study in medical college.

B. The most difficult English language skill for pre-clinical medical students is the reading skill. The components like '*reading to develop an in-depth critical understanding of the medical textbooks*' (41.79%), '*reading reports*' (31.34%), and '*reading quickly through a text to get a general view of the content*' (28.35%) are the most difficult for the students. The overall mean reading skill stands at 33.82 %.

The second most difficult English language skill for pre-clinical medical students is the writing skill in which different components showed different levels of difficulty, such as *writing accurately (grammar)* with (35.83%), '*giving written explanation about graphs, tables, charts, and diagrams*' (31.35%), and '*organizing ideas in logical sequences while writing in paragraph form*' (29.85%). The overall mean writing skill is 32.34%.

According to the students' self-reported feedback, the third most challenging language skills are that they experience difficulties in using various aspects/ components of speaking. The highest difficulty is '*speaking accurately grammar*'

(34.32%), the second most challenging component is '*participating effectively in discussion*' (31.34%), and the third most challenging component of the speaking skill for students is '*communicating ideas confidently*' is with the percentage of (28.35%). The overall mean for the speaking skill is 31.33%.

The fourth most difficult English language skill for pre-clinical medical students is the listening skills. The results are 'understanding vocabulary/medical terms' (22.40%), 'understanding the organization of lectures' (22.38%), and 'recognizing supporting ideas/examples' (20.90%). The overall mean of the listening skill is 22.56 %.

C. Regarding students' language lacks or deficiencies, it is found with the students' self-reported feedback that they place it in an overall 'fair' category (49.25%) as compared to 'good' (28.37%) and 'poor' (22.38%) levels. In this respect, the students have an overall moderate or medium level of English language proficiency. The students' feedback indicated further that their level of proficiency at the time they entered the medical college was also at a moderate level such as writing (58.22%), reading (56.71%), listening (56.71%), and speaking (56.71%). The students' feedback did not make a clear and decisive indication of their 'good' level of English language proficiency. Likewise, the student's English language proficiency today/ i.e., at the time the study was conducted, remained at a moderate level also according to the figurative indications such as reading (55.22%), writing (67.16%), listening (67.16%), and speaking skills (64.17%). Finally, the data acquired in this study revealed that the medical students at the pre-clinical phase of the medical study have a moderate proficiency level. The students struggled to improve and maintain their English language proficiency at a 'good' level. Another matter of immense significance in this study is the students' difficulty in using the English Language in writing, reading, speaking, and listening skills.

## VI. CONCLUSION

In line with the words of Kayaoğlu and Akbaş (2016), medical students' awareness must be raised regarding their language lacks and the level of difficulties in listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills. The English language course should not be implemented simply as part of their education but as an essential component of medical education. The foundation year English language course should be designed with student centeredness, and it should be based on English for medical purposes. The foundation year English language course should have at least two semesters with an improved assessment process. It is also recommended that the basic science subjects at the foundation level should be taught in English. According to the students' responses in this study, their English language proficiency is of moderate level, so all the stakeholders, such as the key decision-makers, medical professionals, faculty members, and the students, should play a substantial role in improving the learning and teaching strategies to increase the medical students' English language proficiency.

## REFERENCES

- [1] Abdul Haq, F. (1982). *An Analysis of Syntactic Errors in the Composition of Jordanian Secondary Students*. Unpublished MA Thesis. Jordan. Yarmouk University.
- [2] Alharby. M. (2005). *ESP Target Situation Needs Analysis: The English Language Communicative Needs as Perceived by Health Professionals in the Riyadh Area*. Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, University of Georgia Athens, Georgia.
- [3] Almoallim, H., Aldahlawi, S., Alqahtani, E., Alqurashi, S., & Munshi, A. (2010). Difficulties facing first-year medical students at Umm Alqura University in Saudi Arabia. *EMHJ-Eastern Mediterranean Health Journal*, 16(12), 1272-1277, 2010.
- [4] Alrabai, F. (2016). Factors underlying low achievement of Saudi EFL learners. *International Journal of English Linguistics*, 6(3), 21-37.
- [5] Gaffas, Z. M. (2016). *The Impact of English Language Preparatory Programmes in a Saudi Arabian University: An Investigation of Students' Perceptions of their Language Difficulties, Experiences, and Suggestions* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Sheffield).
- [6] Kaliyadan, F., Thalankandathil, N., Parupalli, S. R., Amin, T. T., Balaha, M. H., & Ali, W. H. A. B. (2015). English language proficiency and academic performance: A study of a medical preparatory year program in Saudi Arabia. *Avicenna journal of medicine*, 5(4), 140-144.
- [7] Kayaoğlu, M. & Dağ Akbaş, L. (2016) An Investigation into Medical Students' English Language Needs, Participatory Educational Research (PER) Special Issue 2016-I, pp., 63-71; 01 January 2016 Available online at <http://www.partedres.com> ISSN: 2148-6123 <http://dx.doi.org/10.17275/per.16.spi.1.8>
- [8] Mohammad, T. & Hazarika, Z. (2016). Difficulties of learning EFL in KSA: Writing skills in context. *International Journal of English Linguistics*, 6(3), 105-117.
- [9] Vahdany, F. & Gerivani, L. (2016). An Analysis of the English Language Needs of Medical Students and General Practitioners: A Case Study of Guilan University of Medical Sciences. *International Journal of English Language and Literature Studies*, 5(2), 104–110. <https://doi.org/10.18488/journal.23/2016.5.2/23.2.104.110>



**Abdul Qadeer** is a lecturer of English at the Faculty of Languages and Translation, King Khalid University, Abha, Saudi Arabia. He earned his M.A in English literature from the University of the Punjab, Lahore, Pakistan, and his M.Ed. from the University of Karachi, Pakistan. Currently, he is pursuing his Ph.D. focusing on English for Specific Purposes (ESP) at the Faculty of Languages and Linguistics, Universiti Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.



**Daniel Chow Ung T'chiang** is the Deputy Dean of Research at the Faculty of Languages and Linguistics, Universiti Malaya, Kuala Lumpur. His areas of interest include English for Specific Purposes and Critical Genre Analysis. He is currently involved in research projects on Professional Discourses and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). He is also the Treasurer of the Malaysian Association of Applied Linguistics (MAAL), an affiliate of the *International Association of Applied Linguistics* (AILA).