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## СПИСАНИЕ НА БЪЛГАРСКОТО НАУЧНО ДРУЖЕСТВО ПО ФАРМАЦИЯ

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## ON THE NEEDS OF PHARMACY STUDENTS TO COMMUNICATE IN ENGLISH: A STUDY

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**Summary.** The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages issued by the Council of Europe suggests practitioners are to reflect upon the communicative needs of learners and learners themselves are to be brought to reflect upon their needs. The aim of the present study is to identify, analyse and draw conclusions about the needs of pharmacy students at the Medical University of Sofia to communicate in English. The needs analysis is based on a questionnaire and interviews revealing students' motivation, their language learning difficulties, favourite techniques, proactive attitude to learning and their expectations. The teacher can meet students' needs by developing a course in pharmaceutical English with a syllabus, based on the Communicative Approach, involving role play tasks, based on situations, characteristic of the pharmaceutical domain.

**Key words:** pharmacy students; analysis of what is needed; English language learning and teaching; communicative approach

## ПОТРЕБНОСТИТЕ НА СТУДЕНТИТЕ ПО ФАРМАЦИЯ ДА ОБЩУВАТ НА АНГЛИЙСКИ ЕЗИК

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**Резюме.** Статията очертава, обобщава и прави заключения върху резултатите от анализа на потребностите от обучение по английски език, извършен със студенти по фармация в Медицинския университет – София. Въпросникът и интервютата разкриват мотивацията на студентите, основните трудности в езиковото им обучение, предпочитаните от тях техники, активната им нагласа за обучение и техните очаквания относно употребата на медицински английски. Съобразно с потребностите на студентите преподавателите могат да разработят програма на базата на комуникативния подход, съдържаща групови и ролеви езикови задачи върху ситуации, характерни за областта на фармацията.

**Ключови думи:** студенти по фармация, анализ на потребностите, обучение по английски език, комуникативен подход

### Introduction

A number of new challenges in the political, economic and educational sphere of life have appeared with Bulgaria's accession to the EU. European integration is impossible without a policy of mobility of people and the workforce. It requires that Europeans be well-equipped in respect to language communication and able to enter into close co-operation in spheres of business, science, education and culture. The process of integration is unthinkable without people's linguistic abilities to transfer, discuss and implement new ideas [3].

The diversity in communication necessitates the sophistication of plurilingual and pluricultural competences, the development of which can be boosted by the ability of intercomprehension [1].

European institutions have traditionally outlined basic directions in language teaching and learning. The latest achievement of European policy in the sphere of languages is the working out of 'The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages' (CEF). Apart from suggesting a reliable instrument for measuring linguistic knowledge, it also elaborates on teaching languages for the purpose of using them in the educational and occupational domains. CEF highlights the significance of needs analysis to language teaching and learning. It tackles the identification of needs as a major component of educational systems [3]. Thus, it appears that an analysis of the communicative needs is a major initial stage of planning and designing a language course for pharmacy students.

## Literature Review

The first comprehensive study of needs analysis was made in Munby's book "Communicative Syllabus Design" (1978). Elaborating on his model, Chambers defines it as one of Target Situation Analysis [2]. The main element of Munby's model, the Communicative Needs Processor (CNP), is used to determine the learner's purpose for studying a language and the professional sphere in which the foreign language will be used, the time, place and psychological circumstances in which the language will be used [9]. Characteristics of the communication act such as participants, medium, mode and channel of communication and the manner of interaction are also identified.

While working for The Council of Europe Project № 4, Richterich drew attention to the 'objective needs' at the initial stage when a language course is being designed [10]. Present Situation Analysis developed by Richterich and Chancerel is considered to gather a multitude of data such as the duration of the foreign language education, the level of the course, the present abilities of the learners, which have been identified using the results of entrance tests.

What learners lack at the beginning of a course and have to acquire by the end is termed lacks or deficiencies and studied by the so-called Deficiency Analysis. The lacks which are the difference between the present and the needed skills and language knowledge can become the line which is to be followed in developing the language syllabus [8].

According to Dudley-Evans and St. John, the importance of Means Analysis is that it reveals valuable data about the cultural environment of a language course [6].

Register Analysis is called 'lexicostatistics' by Swales [5] or 'frequency analysis' [11] because it rests on the understanding that some lexical and grammatical forms are more frequent in specialized texts. Focusing on the functions of the text and on the writer's purpose, Discourse Analysis reveals how sentences combine to realize the communicative purpose [11]. Another aspect to the analysis of texts is Genre Analysis which differentiates between the different text types by revealing regularities in the structure of different types of texts [6].

Nowadays researchers view needs analysis more frequently as a system of complementing approaches. They prefer to take advantage, reckon and elaborate on all types of needs analysis approaches.

One of the most reliable and comprehensive concepts of needs analysis has been put forward by

Dudley-Evans and St. John. They suggest a modern conception of needs analysis based on the research carried out into different types of analyses. They have proposed a contemporary concept of needs analysis which includes: environmental situation, which corresponds to Means Analysis; information about learners, concerning personal characteristics; language information about learners, concerning their language skills and use (Present Situation Analysis); learners' deficiencies (Deficiency Analysis), learners' short-term needs from the course; learners' language learning needs (the favourite strategies and techniques learners use in language learning); professional information about learners (Target Situation Analysis); information about the communication in the target situation (Register, Discourse and Genre Analysis [6].

CEF emphasizes that needs analysis is a major element on which a language course is prepared. The document also indicates that examining needs is central to teaching languages in connection with a certain domain. Needs analysis has helped to generate language-using tasks which a learner should tackle in situations 'which arise in the various domains' [3]. Thus, the performance of an analysis to investigate the needs of pharmacy students can become a basis for the development of an effective syllabus for the university course in pharmaceutical English.

## Objectives

The aim of the present study is to identify and analyse the needs of pharmacy students at the Medical University of Sofia to communicate in English. The data of the survey can be used as a basis for drawing conclusions about syllabus design, the choice of methods and techniques used in teaching pharmaceutical English.

## Method

In investigating the needs of pharmacy students for a course in pharmaceutical English, the contemporary approaches to needs analysis can be used to reveal and analyse detailed information. For the purposes of this research, the needs analysis concept of Dudley-Evans and St. John was used to work out a questionnaire to perform the present study.

## Participants

The needs analysis study was carried out with students from the Faculty of Pharmacy at the Medical University of Sofia. The questionnaire was filled in by 17 students in 2007 and 15 in 2008 during their course in pharmaceutical English. They were first-year students aged 18 or 19.

### Instrumentation

Questionnaires were used to reveal more about the communicative needs of pharmacy students. The data can help to improve the methods of language training [4]. After data from the questionnaires was summarized, individual and group interviews were carried with the students to discover more about how these data were to be interpreted.

### Results

For the purposes of analysis, the data gathered by means of the questionnaire were summarized in a form, the content of which is the same as that of the questionnaire form. In the form, summarizing the data (Appendix 1), the number opposite each answer corresponds to the percentage of students, who have chosen that answer.

### Analysis and Discussion

The study reveals important aspects of personal information such as the students' motivation when taking the course in pharmaceutical English. Answering to Question 5 in the questionnaire, 44% per cent of the students determine the course as a priority. At the same time, Question 7 reveals 63% of the students consider the English language course at the university to be a highly efficient way of studying the language. Thus, in spite of its compulsory character the course in pharmaceutical English is deemed essential.

Pharmacy students chose to give more than one answer to Question 6 about their reasons for learning pharmaceutical English. As seen in the questionnaire data, 31% of the respondents pointed out that learning pharmaceutical English is associated with getting better opportunities for studying abroad at the present, 78% – with a good job in the future and 75% – with a good pay. Forty- one per cent connected knowledge of English with a higher social status. At the same time, 9% of the respondents noted that they want to learn English because they would like to understand English culture. This finding explicitly demonstrates a low level of integrative motivation. Other motivations to learning English, which were identified, were travel orientations (56%), friendship (37.5%) and using the English media (41%).

Thus, young people seem to be instrumentally motivated as far as learning pharmaceutical English is concerned and view English as a means to achieve their goals.

The questionnaire results indicate that students' behaviour in the English class is almost equally

determined by learning goals and by performance. Question 23 indicates that during role play 47% of the students focus on good performance and 53% – on achieving language goals. Question 6 shows that good marks seem to be a good incentive to study English for 53 per cent of the students.

When asked about their greatest difficulty in using language, most of them spot the lack of good communication skills and the inability to speak fluently (Question 24). 81 per cent define their greatest problem as 'searching for a word for a long time'. 'Using the right word' reflects the issue of collocations and 34% identify that as a problem. A smaller 23% points to some grammatical category as the reason for anxiety while using English. Thus, for the pharmacy students the Present Situation Analysis shows that teaching pharmaceutical English is to be directed to creating adequate language skills and prerequisites for fluency in communication.

If learners are invited to negotiate aspects of the course, then the course content has relevance to the learners' expectations and motivation to participate in class increases. The answer 'I prefer to choose the text for my presentation myself' gets 72% (Question 8), while those where the teacher determines all class work or the topic of presentation receive 41% and 34%, respectively. Question 18 confirms these findings relating them to group work. To summarize, the pharmacy students feel more confident when being proactive as far as participating in the choice of language strategies and tasks is concerned.

Different learners learn in different ways, so it is crucial to determine "what the learner needs to do in order to learn" [7]. Not surprisingly, the questionnaire data indicate that 69% of the students report group work is a favourable learning context and 85% of them believe that individual work is very rewarding (Question 13). The data from the interviews show students favour group work because it boosts rapport between the participants. If students are asked not about language work in general, but about doing assignments, 48 per cent of the pharmacy students prefer individual tasks to group ones (Question 14, answer d. and e.). The students' main objection to group tasks is the unequal contribution of the group members.

On the whole, students of medicine showed a positive attitude to group work supported mainly by the argument that group work presupposes a great deal of free communication.

Moreover, a high percentage, about 85% prefer role play which is essentially group work (Question 19).

The interviews reveal role play is favoured because of the realistic context. Some educational implications which can be inferred concerning role play are that discourse situations incorporated in a communicative syllabus are deemed effective by the learners.

When asked what they focus on during role play (Question 20), 81% of the students answer that they forget about language and think about the situation. Fluency (53% of the answers to Question 21) and the right choice of words (31% of the answers) become pivotal, while only 16% think about grammar structure. This is an indication that in role play the transfer of meaning comes to the fore and becomes the students' major short-term goal.

The results demonstrate students of pharmacy are more interested in fluency than in correctness. When discussed during the individual interviews, the strong focus on fluency was explained by the students' classroom experience of the Communicative Approach in language learning and their rising awareness that the final goal of studying a language is to transfer meaning through messages.

As far as long-term goals are concerned, medical students seem to view the target situation as one where they'll use English in a lot of professional situations. 78 per cent will talk with colleagues and 75 per cent will write to colleagues (Question 10). Fifty-three per cent expect to read scientific texts and 31% – to write scientific articles. A relatively high percentage for the Bulgarian circumstances (37.5%) expects to work with English-speaking clients.

The study also shows whether these plans for the future translate into current motivation to achieve short-term goals such as raising their level of English. About 66 % are willing to raise their level of English to either advanced (53%) or proficiency (13%) (Question 25).

### Conclusion

CEF suggests language teachers are to reflect upon the communicative needs of the learners and learners themselves are to be brought to reflect upon their needs [3]. An investigation of needs using a questionnaire seems to reach both goals.

The survey results have demonstrated that the instrumental motivation is very high and the integrative one – rather low. This presupposes that a course oriented to the pharmaceutical domain will be followed with a high level of motivation. Moreover, the motivation of university students is mainly intrinsic, deriving from their own goals connected to achieving a good social and financial position.

The students aim at reaching learning goals showing they view studying English not as a short-term but as a long-term goal. The focus on learning goals can be used by the teacher in emphasizing the value of language tasks for the students' overall progress in English.

The questionnaire reveals that the students find their greatest difficulties, and respectively, their objective needs and wants, in the lack of fluency in communication and the inadequate collocations. This understanding gives the teacher the opportunity to develop a syllabus based on the Communicative Approach with an emphasis on the terminology and collocations, characteristic of the pharmaceutical domain.

University students are experienced enough in language work to feel confident when working autonomously. Group work is also favoured because it allows more extensive and unstructured communication and boosts creativity and cooperation. Role play is assessed as being the most rewarding due to the realistic context it provides. The questionnaire data point that the teacher can be confident to meet students' needs when suggesting communicative tasks involving role play, based on situations, pertaining to the pharmaceutical profession.

A priority in learning goals is fluency because students realize the final goal of studying a language is to transfer meaning through message. An emphasis is being placed on the correct use of English by students who do their utmost to achieve an advanced or proficiency level of English.

The pharmacy students are confident in negotiating aspects of their course and the learning techniques employed during the course. They are willing to choose topics and types of learning activities, individual or group work and share opinion on the topics of texts and presentations. Thus, the study data demonstrate the students' proactive attitude to learning English results from their learning goals.

The analysis of the target situation reveals students expect to use pharmaceutical English in a variety of professional communication acts, both oral and written, requiring to practice English both in the personal and the occupational domain and in connection with situations, involving both users of pharmaceutical products and colleagues. Thus, expressing meaning and using collocations become central to the English language syllabus.

The results from the survey of pharmacy students can be used for the development of an effective syllabus based on the Communicative Approach involving situations from the domain of pharmacy.

**Appendix 1: Data Form, Based on the Questionnaire for Pharmacy Students**

The number opposite each answer corresponds to the percentage of medical students, who have chosen that answer.

<b>Questionnaire for Pharmacy Students</b>
<b>Please, fill in the following questionnaire. Choose only one answer except as otherwise stated.</b>
<b>1. Sex</b>
a. Female – 56%; b. Male – 44%
<b>2. Have you passed any standardized language test? What certificate have you obtained?</b> This is an open-ended question with the following results: Cambridge First Certificate – 19% Certificate in Advanced English – 3%
<b>3. What kind of secondary school have you graduated from?</b>
a. secondary comprehensive school – 44%
b. secondary school specialized in natural sciences – 25%
c. secondary school specialized in foreign language education – 18%
d. secondary school specialized in English language education – 13%
<b>4. If the course in Pharmaceutical English was not compulsory, would you still take it?</b>
a. Yes – 63%; b. No – 37%
<b>5. Should English language teaching be a priority in university education?</b>
a. Yes – 44%; b. No – 56%
<b>6. Why do you think mastering Pharmaceutical English is important?</b> It will help you to.....? You can choose more than one answer.
a. get a good pay – 75%
b. get a good job – 78%
c. get high social status – 41%
d. get a higher mark at the examination – 53%
e. get a scholarship for an exchange program abroad or another opportunity to study abroad – 31%
f. make more friends abroad – 37.5%
g. read more books and understand movies and songs in English – 41%
h. travel to foreign countries – 56%
i. understand English way of life – 13%
j. understand English culture – 9%
<b>7. Which do you think is the most efficient way of learning languages? You can choose more than one answer.</b>
a. by following a course at the university – 63%
b. in one-to-one lessons – 23%
c. long and frequent visits to a country where English is a native language – 69%
d. a language course in such a country – 23%
<b>8. If you agree with any of the following statements, please, circle the answer. You can choose more than one answer.</b>
a. I prefer the teacher to determine what we do in class – 41%
b. I prefer the teacher to determine the topic of my presentation – 34 %
c. I prefer to choose the text for my presentation myself – 72%
d. I prefer speaking on pharmaceutical topics to writing on the same topics – 53%
e. I prefer reading medical articles to writing on pharmaceutical topics – 75%

**9. Which helps you to learn quicker? You can choose more than one answer.**

- a. grouping words according to topics – 37.5%
- b. recording words as they appear in the text – 31%
- c. learning words in whole phrases or sentences – 53%
- d. the teacher tells me unknown words when I don't know them – 31%

**10. How do you expect to use General and Pharmaceutical English in the future? You can choose more than one answer.**

- a. to talk with colleagues – 78%
- b. to write to colleagues – 75%
- c. to talk with clients – 37.5%
- d. to read scientific articles – 53%
- e. to write science articles and presentations – 31%

**11. What English language skills do you think you'll use most in the future? You can choose more than one answer.**

- a. listening – 78%; b. reading – 85%; c. speaking – 53%; d. writing – 34%

**12. What do you consider most important in language work in the classroom? You can choose more than one answer.**

- a. to learn to speak without mistakes – 34%
- b. to learn to speak fluently so that I don't have to search for words for a long time – 81%
- c. to develop communication skills – 72%

**13. Do you like working...? You can choose more than one answer.**

- a. in a group – 69%; b. individually – 85%

**14. When you have to do an assignment, how often would you like to work in a group?**

- a. always – 13%
- b. often – 23%
- c. sometimes – 16%
- d. rarely – 34%
- e. never – 14%

**15. When your teacher asks you to work in groups, do you feel that some contribute more and others less?**

- a. always – 23%
- b. often – 19%
- c. sometimes – 13%
- d. rarely – 31%
- e. never – 14%

**16. If your answer in Question 15 is a/, b/ or c/, do you think that this affects how well the whole group does? Why?**

- a. Yes – 53% b. No – 47%

**17. If in a group task in class your teacher gives you a poor mark, does this...?**

- a. Intimidate you for what your teacher might say – 25%
- b. You are not concerned about other students' opinion and the low mark – 25%
- c. Your main aim is to learn so that you won't repeat the same mistakes in the future – 50%

**18. Your teacher divides you into groups and asks you to do a group project.. When do you show more interest and work harder?**

- a. when the teacher tells you exactly what you have to do – 23%
- b. when the teacher just gives you some introductory guidance on what is expected from you and waits for you to finish it – 14%
- c. when the teacher leaves you relatively free as far as how to do the project and interferes only when you ask for help – 63%



<p><b>19. What do you prefer to do?</b></p> <p>a. role play in a realistic context – 85%</p> <p>b. other group work – 6%</p> <p>c. individual assignments – 9%</p>
<p><b>20. When you do role play, what do you focus on?</b></p> <p>a. the language – 19%; b. the situation – 81%</p>
<p><b>21. What aspect of language performance do you want to achieve during the role play?</b></p> <p>a. fluency – 53%</p> <p>b. right choice of words – 31%</p> <p>c. grammar correctness – 16%</p>
<p><b>22. Your teacher assigns you a role play. When are you more dedicated to the task?</b></p> <p>a. When you find the subject interesting and connected with a realistic context – 66%</p> <p>b. When you are not really interested but you are concerned about teachers' opinions – 34%</p>
<p><b>23. What are you most interested in when performing a role play?</b></p> <p>a. to use English in the best way for the role assigned to you – 53%</p> <p>b. to get a high mark – 47%</p>
<p><b>24. Which is your main difficulty in using English? You can choose more than one answer.</b></p> <p>a. searching for a word for a long time – 81%</p> <p>b. using the right word – 34%</p> <p>c. mastering grammar – 23%</p>
<p><b>25. What level of English do you want to master?</b></p> <p>a. higher intermediate – 34%</p> <p>b. advanced – 53%</p> <p>c. proficiency – 13%</p>

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