

## Abstract

### Teaching English for Communication Purposes in a Medical Context

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This study explores the application of the concept of communicative competence to the teaching of English for Communication Purposes in a Medical Context. This exploration is guided by five research questions that focus on the meaning of communicative competence (RQ 1 & 3), the needs and assessment requirements of learners from the viewpoints of learners and theorists (RQ 2 & 4), and ways of developing existing courses in health communication to meet the needs and assessment requirements of learners (RQ 5). In investigating these questions, an attempt is made to link the linguistic concept of communicative competence to the pedagogical demands of a communicative teaching/learning situation.

The site of the study is the Faculty of Medical Sciences at the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine, and involves a target population of 199 first-year students in dentistry, medicine, pharmacy, and veterinary medicine who take two courses in health communication. The study draws

on six data sources that combine qualitative and quantitative research methodologies: a focus group interview (N = 8), a questionnaire (N = 93), a series of medical student self-evaluations of communication skills (N= 175, N = 124, N =73), student examination performance, syllabus documents, and literature sources.

The findings indicate that for the student population, comprising students of diverse language and cultural backgrounds, a number of linguistics issues emerge. These issues have implications for curriculum development in health communication and for the teaching of communication skills. The study demonstrates that the learner's perspective, as well as other traditional influences, such as the views of instructors and curriculum developers, should be considered in formulating linguistic, communication education, curricular and pedagogical policy to meet the needs of health professionals and the persons with whom they interact. Making linkages between linguistics and communication appears feasible in the teaching of English for Communication Purposes in a Medical Context.

**Keywords:** Godfrey A. Steele, communicative competence, communication competence, English for Communication Purposes, undergraduate medical communication skills, undergraduate medical education curriculum