ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the teaching and learning of English for Medical Purposes (EMP) in a Syrian Arab university (Tishreen University). It investigates the inherent contradictions in the position of EMP in an Arab-medium university by drawing on the socio-political and economic factors shaping English language education policy in Syria. It also critiques “mainstream” ESP through examining the “purpose” in English for Medical Purposes. Rather than viewing learning as an end product, this study suggests that learning English is part of a dynamic process of learning to become a doctor in Syria and as part of constructing the 21st Century Syrian “doctor” identity.

I draw on aspects of poststructuralism and complexity theory to take the analysis of English for Specific Purposes beyond issues of needs analysis, content, and materials development. ESP, from its outset, has been proposed for decades as a commodity that meets students’ linguistic and communicative needs. However important these concerns are for the development of the discipline, as I argue in this thesis, ESP seems to adopt a “mechanistic” approach by predetermining “needs” and “purposes” which fails to account for the complexity of human beings’ behaviours and responses in educational contexts. The deterministic conceptualisation of ESP places rigid boundaries between ESP and the reality of the medicine profession, therefore, fails to meet students’ needs which transcend boundaries of classroom in aspiration for recognition by the medical community worldwide. English for Medical Purposes, in this study, goes beyond “specific purposes” to account for the role of English as a foreign language in constructing doctor identity and in the process of becoming a doctor.

Data in this qualitative research were collected through focus groups with students of medicine in Tishreen University, semi-structured interviews with medical tutors and management officials in the Faculty of Medicine and the Higher Institute of Languages, as well as ESP teachers. Policy documents were analysed, and field notes were taken in classroom and hospital observations. Based on the analysis of these sources, a deeper understanding of EMP at Tishreen University is reached through the lens of poststructuralism and complexity theory. Finally, this thesis ends by drawing an ESP/Applied Linguistics relationship among the implications the findings have for policy makers, teachers and medical students, alongside recommendations for future ESP research directions.
DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my father, Ibrahim, who believed in me when I didn’t even believe in myself, a loving man who has not only raised me but devoted his life for my education and intellectual development.

It is also dedicated to my mother who blessed me with her immense love, encouragement and prayers.

My aunt Mimi who has been missed very much, this is also for your soul.

This is for you my beloved.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My first thanks go to my beloved Syria and to Tishreen University for the generous PhD scholarship.

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With all the ups and downs of this bumpy road, the ones who insisted to be close to me persisted to show endless love and support. Thank you my precious sisters, Nancy& Liza, and my brother, Ayham. Thank you, Mazen, for your genuine love and support. Thanks now and forever to Dr. Malek, a phenomenal friend who has been a great source of motivation and constant immeasurable support reassuring me at all times that “step by step”, “we can do it”.

Last but not least, thanks to my wonderful Razan for being a life-time friend, to beloved Maryam for sharing my study life in the UK, and to Anwar for his unique friendship and support.

Thank you all. I’m blessed and I owe you much.
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AL</td>
<td>Applied Linguistics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AMI</td>
<td>Arabic as a Medium of Instruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BERA</td>
<td>British Educational Research Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BE</td>
<td>Business English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAL</td>
<td>Critical Applied Linguistics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CARS</td>
<td>Creating a Research Space</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CEAP</td>
<td>Critical English for Academic Purposes</td>
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<tr>
<td>CNP</td>
<td>Communicative Needs Processor</td>
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<tr>
<td>CoP</td>
<td>Community of Practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EAP</td>
<td>English for Academic Purposes</td>
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<tr>
<td>EFL</td>
<td>English as a Foreign Language</td>
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<td>EGL</td>
<td>English as a Global Language</td>
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<td>EIL</td>
<td>English as an International Language</td>
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<tr>
<td>ELF</td>
<td>English as a Lingua Franca</td>
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<tr>
<td>ELT</td>
<td>English Language Teaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EMI</td>
<td>English as a Medium of Instruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EAMP</td>
<td>English for Academic Medical Purposes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EMP</td>
<td>English for Medical Purposes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESL</td>
<td>English as a Second Language</td>
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<tr>
<td>EST</td>
<td>English for Science and Technology</td>
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<tr>
<td>ESP</td>
<td>English for Specific Purposes</td>
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<tr>
<td>ESPJ</td>
<td>Journal English for Specific Purposes</td>
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<tr>
<td>ETF</td>
<td>European Training Foundation</td>
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<tr>
<td>FL</td>
<td>Foreign Language</td>
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<tr>
<td>GE</td>
<td>General English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HIL</td>
<td>Higher Institute of Languages</td>
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<tr>
<td>IATEFL</td>
<td>International Association of Teachers of English as a Foreign Language</td>
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<tr>
<td>IELT</td>
<td>International English Language Testing System</td>
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<tr>
<td>L1</td>
<td>First Language</td>
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<td>L2</td>
<td>Second Language</td>
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<tr>
<td>LP</td>
<td>Language Policy</td>
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<tr>
<td>LPP</td>
<td>Legitimate Peripheral Participation</td>
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<td>MoHE</td>
<td>Ministry of Higher Education</td>
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<td>MoE</td>
<td>Ministry of Education</td>
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<td>MoH</td>
<td>Ministry of Health</td>
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<tr>
<td>NNS</td>
<td>Non-Native Speaker</td>
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<td>NS</td>
<td>Native Speaker</td>
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<td>NTFL</td>
<td>National Test of Foreign Languages</td>
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<td>SANA</td>
<td>Syrian Arab News Agency</td>
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<td>SFL</td>
<td>Systematic Functional Linguistics</td>
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<td>SLA</td>
<td>Second Language Acquisition</td>
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<td>SME</td>
<td>Small Medium Enterprise</td>
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<tr>
<td>TCF</td>
<td>Test de Connaissance de Français</td>
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<tr>
<td>TESOL</td>
<td>Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages</td>
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<tr>
<td>TESP</td>
<td>Tertiary, Secondary and Primary</td>
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<tr>
<td>TOEFL</td>
<td>Test of English as a Foreign Language</td>
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<tr>
<td>UMD</td>
<td>Unified Medical Dictionary</td>
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<td>UNDP</td>
<td>United Nations Development Programme</td>
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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1. Introduction

English for specific purposes (ESP) courses have been established in many institutions over the past 40 years, but relatively little is known about the effects of these programmes on the institutions and people who provide and engage in them as teachers and learners. This study contributes to a greater understanding of the effects of ESP programmes in a Syrian university. In this introductory chapter of the thesis I shall set parameters and introduce the main argument of the study through reflection in a chronological format on my ESP teaching and learning experience in order to unpick the personal and professional concerns in an ESP learning situation which demands research. First, I preface the thesis with a description of how I began teaching English for specific purposes reflecting on my English language teaching experience at Tishreen University, a Syrian public sector higher education institution in Latakia. This will show what motivates me personally to have undertaken this research. An account of the professional concerns and their origins is firstly presented at the end of reflection on my early ESP teaching experience at Tishreen University and later rehearsed in my reflection on my ESP learning at the postgraduate MA level in a UK institution inspired by what I term “mainstream” ESP. Next, an historical perspective of “mainstream” ESP is reviewed alongside a review of key issues raised by the view of an alternative critical perspective which inspired my current PhD study and enlightened my thinking towards critiquing ESP. The rationale for the study, aims of the study, and an account of its significance are then stated. Finally, an outline of the thesis is provided.

1.1 Becoming a researcher: Episodes of my teaching experience of ESP in Tishreen University

I have a must-tell story, but the beginning or end of such a personal journey is never easy to define, a story of a teacher and doctoral student involved in researching an ESP situation through stories told by various people in the research. All I could say of the story now is written but my imaginative writing ability betrayed me because of my interest in staying as loyal as possible to what people in my story said and how honest I could be when retelling their version of the story. Having been nostalgic for my English
Literature classes back in the early 2000s, Charles Dickens’ sentence in the opening Chapter of David Copperfield (1850) is what I decided to begin my story with, whether it turns out to be worth-reading or not,

“Whether I shall turn out to be the hero of my own life, or whether that station will be held by anybody else, these pages must show”.

Graduating as the top student from the English Literature Department in Tishreen University in Latakia, Syria in 2003 was not only rewarding at the personal level but was an academic privilege which opened up immediate employment in academia, including eligibility to apply for a teaching assistant position at state-sector universities in 2004. After successful application, I started my career as an English language teacher in the Higher Institute of Languages at Tishreen University in Latakia in Syria where I was responsible for teaching English across all the university’s disciplines from Arts to Science. Although I had studied a 1-year Postgraduate Diploma in Linguistics, I would not claim, at the time, that I had either proper teaching qualifications or preparations. University English language teachers are not required to have a teaching qualification prior to beginning teaching, unlike English language teachers in Basic and Secondary Education. The qualifications I held at the time were simply inadequate to accommodate the demands of the wide range of field-specific English courses I was hired to deliver. With only an English literature and linguistics background, the mission was daunting. I became particularly insecure upon facing the core scientific subjects when teaching English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses. My first teaching experience was at the Medical School where I taught English for medical students. At that time, the course was not called English for Medical Purposes; it was an English compulsory subject in the curriculum with a focus on specialised language.

English in the Syrian state Arabic-medium universities is taught as a foreign language (EFL) which is a difficult category to specify in the English language teaching discipline in terms of learners proficiency because, as Crystal (2003:65) has argued, “everything depends on just how great a command of English is considered acceptable to count as a speaker of English” (Crystal, 2003:68) (author’s emphasis). I had not heard of the acronym EMP until a couple of years later where I took my Masters in ESP at Warwick University. At the time I was teaching at Tishreen University, there was no teacher supervision or appraisal provided, and no course descriptions made available for teachers. The ESP teachers were also in charge of designing material to supplement the
general English textbook prescribed by the institution. The English textbook required was the *General English Skills* but teachers were asked by the institution to teach a minimum input of specialised English (Medical English in this case) so what I did was what I found previous teachers did such as using translation and vocabulary teaching to account for the required specialised English. At that time, in 2004, scant use was made of ESP books at Tishreen University, however, after 2006, ESP textbooks began to appear in large bookstores in the capital Damascus so that the Higher Institute of Languages could order from. This process does not follow the norms when universities normally instruct on the bookstores on what books to order. Rather, the universities are limited in choice of books available in the bookstores.

Looking back, from an ex-teacher perspective, I shed light on key reflective issues from my teaching experience; mainly the issue of low ‘status’ of English and English language teachers in Tishreen University. At this point, my writing is based on personal reflection on a professional experience rather than on research investigation.

### 1.1.1 Status of English in the university culture

As a novice ESP teacher, I used to listen to students and was mindful of their concerns and purposes of learning which seemed to revolve around passing exams with high grades regardless of the quality of the teaching and learning. However, at most times, I masqueraded as a strict English language teacher in response to my enormous frustration with medical students’ negative account of English in the curriculum. In my very first lecture of the English course I had been informed by some of my medical students that they viewed English as ‘credential-seeking’, exam-oriented and secondary to medical subjects in the curriculum. For this reason, I was constantly pressured to deliver the course mainly by repeating basic language input which they were familiar with from school days. There was no interest or meaning attached to learning English, it seemed. There was only an interest in gaining credits for having the qualification.
1.1.2 Status of language teachers in the university community

Although I agree that comparison between English and other core medical subjects is not valid, in my naivety, I felt I couldn’t allow these students to underestimate my role and my professionalism and challenge my credential as a language teacher. Medical students, it seemed to me, have an overly high opinion of themselves; related to the social status that Syrian society ascribes to medicine as a high-stakes profession and the fact that only high achievers in the baccalaureate in the scientific major are eligible for entry to the Faculty of Medicine. One successful strategy that worked best with these students was imposing an English-only policy in communication inside the classroom. That, in one way or another, alerted them to the fact that although they were the top achievers in high school, there are always things still to learn. Another compelling challenge for me as a novice ESP teacher was the lack of medical knowledge about which I was challenged on a regular basis in the Faculty of Medicine and in other science-orientated disciplines. It was possible to persuade students that my role was teaching the language used in medicine not the medical subject per se. However, they had high expectations with regards to language teacher’s subject matter knowledge.

Officials and administrators in the Medical Faculty, in one way or another created a situation which reinforced the way students perceived English and its teachers, which has become normalised over the longer term (see Vignette 2 below). English language

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**Vignette 1**

On a wintery day in 2004, Dima headed to Tishreen University excited about teaching on her first class in the Medical Faculty. Armed only with her philosophy of learning and acknowledging her lack of the medical knowledge, she made an effort to read medical texts and prepared some supplementary materials to the general English textbook which was assigned by the faculty. To her disappointment, she was confronted with the most striking statement in the very first 10 minutes of the class; in strident tone, “Don’t speak in English. Don’t give us a lot of materials. We have subjects, other than English to study. We only want to ensure obtaining high grades in the final exam”. Others, less stridently openly said they attended to check the register and then leave the class.

Her legal and professional responsibilities were immense and she felt she couldn’t collude in undervaluing English in the way students were doing, although she didn’t deny they were the best in English proficiency when compared with students in other faculties.
teachers are perceived as second class by the institution in comparison with the high profile medical tutors in the Faculty of Medicine. As English teachers are recruited by the Higher Institute of Languages (HIL) in Tishreen University, they are not regarded as members of staff in the Faculty of Medicine and they are paid on an hourly-basis. They are monitored by a clerk who carries out a routine classroom audit to record their attendance. This difference contributes to the low status that ELT teachers are given. I recall a few incidents which highlight how ELT/ESP teachers are marginalised in the institution.

**Vignette 2**

Dima, as an English language teacher, approached the Vice-Dean to request an adjustment of the class timetable to avoid a timetable clash in other faculties. The request was denied on the principle that lecturers in medicine are prioritised over language teachers as they are permanent faculty staff.

From the pedagogical side, Dima sensed a high level of expectation although the standards she was supposed to attain were not anywhere stated. It was hard for her to find out whether she had the freedom to teach the specialised English materials she found relevant and appropriate or not. Dima contacted a senior official in the Faculty of Medicine to advise on what specialised English she was expected to deliver to students and what the course objectives were, but nothing was ever offered. To make matters worse, although the authorities offered neither guidance nor instructions on the course content and modes of delivery, at the end of the term, language teachers faced interrogation if the exam results were unsatisfactory according to the numerical standards of the institution. For example when she had a high percentage of students passing with high marks, she was interrogated about the suitability of her marking criteria. No alternative marking criteria were offered. It seemed their dissatisfaction was mainly due to the numerical standards not being met.

Drawing on my previous engagement with teaching ESP in the same institution 7 years ago, I can describe teaching within the Faculty of Medicine as a struggle for a language teacher who has a lower status than medical lecturers because she/he is not a member of the Faculty in the same way as the medical tutors are. This feeling of inferiority was inspired largely by the senior management officials in the school who treated the English language teachers as “tools” to deliver the English classes, doing a service job unlike the medical specialists who were treated as the elite in the Faculty because of their high-stakes academic topics and because they practise the highest status profession
in Syria. Language teachers are expected to undertake high level of material writing for which they had no training and no communication or support from the administrators in the faculties are offered. Thus, I see teaching ESP there as a “discomfort zone” in Tishreen University where students’ resistance to ESP courses, undermining of English and English language teachers in the institution have become naturalised. Although what I have described is a personal account of my unsatisfactory and unhappy initial teaching experience, I know through communication with other colleagues that these are issues they also face.

Having identified the elements of the “discomfort zone”, I began to believe that this professional concern needs research. I moved to the UK in 2006, which was a pivotal point in my education, upon receiving a full scholarship as a teaching assistant from Tishreen University to pursue my PhD studies in Britain in the field of ESP and return home to work for the same University as a permanent full-time academic member of staff. Although this might seem surprising considering their treatment of me in other respects in the Medical Faculty, I need to point out that I was granted the scholarship being a member of staff at the Higher Institute of Languages. The exact wording of the qualification I was expected to attain was a “PhD in English for Specific Purposes”. It could be inferred from this that policy makers or senior officials in the universities view ESP as a design-delivery model as they quest for applicants to be funded for ESP degrees (at the Master’s and Doctorate level) to cater for the country’s reform of foreign language and ESP teaching in higher education. In the first phase of my studies I familiarised myself with the ESP field, its practice and research and later conducted a small-scale investigation within the field of ESP. I move now to reflect in section (1.2) on my MA at Warwick which revealed a “mainstream” approach to ESP. The purpose of reflection on my MA dissertation is to identify points of significance which can give insights into the current endeavour to understand the ESP situation at Tishreen University.

1.2 Beginning to understand ESP and subsequent disillusionment

During my MA studies at Warwick, I learned that “mainstream” ESP has, since its early days in the late 1960s and the early 1970s, been rooted in the pedagogical concerns of curriculum development, needs analysis and course design. A relatively early definition of ESP by Hutchinson & Waters (1987) is
an approach not as a product. ESP is not a particular kind of language or methodology, nor does it consist of a particular type of teaching material… an approach to language teaching in which all decisions as to content and method are based on the learner’s reason for learning” p19.

In the Syrian local context, since its introduction in 1980s, ESP research on practice reveals the “mainstream” approach in studies like Mleiki (1997) who proposed an integrative approach to syllabus design for teaching English as a foreign language with an emphasis on learners’ needs: Ghanim (2001) has examined the ESP syllabi in the Faculty of Arts and Humanities in Tishreen University through the analysis of learners’ needs and proposed an alternative syllabus. Othman (2003) analysed the student’s English language needs at the language Teaching Institute in Tishreen University, Latakia, Syria. Farhat (2007) investigated the status of teaching Business English listening at Tishreen University through carrying out a needs analysis –based inquiry. Finally, Wureidah (2008) provides in her PhD thesis a framework for designing English material for legal purposes based on the students’ needs at the faculty of Law in Damascus University.

My MA study also revealed a “mainstream” approach. Due to time constraints on my 1-year MA taught course at Warwick University, I had only a basic introduction to the ESP tradition and I was unable to explore it in more depth so I postponed doing the research until I started my doctorate studies. In my MA, I followed the conventional, “mechanical”, “technicist” approach to ESP and I conducted needs analysis and designed business English materials as part of my Professional Practice core module in that programme. I ended up investigating the teaching of Business English Listening at my own university back in Syria for my dissertation.

The study was a small-scale investigation into the status of teaching Business English (BE) Listening at Tishreen University in Syria. I devised a student questionnaire that covered broad themes of students’ awareness and motivation, skills needed and difficulties encountered in materials evaluation, and business English listening skills. The study addressed alternative BE materials and teaching strategies to enhance Business English listening skills (Farhat, 2007). The findings were answers to a problem to ‘fix’ and suggested a materials design for a better Business English teaching. There appeared a high emphasis on the value of learner needs analysis in Business English course design in the Syrian context, ‘inefficiency’ of teaching methodology, and ‘insufficient’ teaching qualification (Farhat, 2007: 53-54). The concluding section
in the dissertation confirmed some of my own thoughts on my prior ESP teaching experience which are unexplored and need further research. At that stage, I had begun to crystallise some of the concerns which inform the research that is reported in this thesis which are beyond needs analysis and course design:

According to teachers and students, current Business English courses are insufficient and are not up to the expectations. There are two different views of what leads to such failure. On the first hand, teachers criticise students’ lack of responsibility for their own learning, lack of awareness, lack of motivation, and the non essentiality of English taught at state institutions (i.e. university) and the centrality of exams marks to them. Other reasons are management-based and beyond teachers’ control. On the other hand, students believe in that the responsibility lies with teachers first and then with other administrative and management restrictions. (Farhat, 2007:53-54, emphasis added)

This suggests that this ESP teaching situation (i.e Business English) appears to be complicated by teachers and students having negative attitudes towards each other, dissatisfaction with the English course, and other problematic issues of learning in the University. From the teachers’ perspective, one teacher criticised students who, in his view, “are passive listeners…they used to listen to the teacher only…they didn’t get used to have their own viewpoints”. However, he was enthusiastic about engaging them in the learning, “trying to make them active…we are trying to make them interact in the class” (Teacher interview 1 in Farhat, 2007:103). Another teacher made an interesting comparison, based on her teaching experience of business English in a state and a private institution. She said:

a lot of students are willing to be enrolled in classes of Business English. and they are very much serious. In learning. They are very much attentive in the class. They ask questions. They usually participate. but they usually also pay money to get into these classes but also I noticed that if you get the same textbook and take to the Faculty of Economics, students will not be very much interested because of the large numbers. (Teacher interview 5 in Farhat, 2007: 116, transcriber’s punctuation, emphasis added)

The emphasis on the distinction between English courses offered in the university and the ones students were privately enrolled on might indicate that the university culture doesn’t seem to provide the learning students are looking for. Simultaneously, students’ behaviour or attitudes towards the university English courses seem negative in various respects.
From students’ perspective in the Faculty of Economics, Business English at Tishreen University was described as “a subject to pass” (Student Interview 2 in Farhat, 2007: 125). Another student described it as “useless...because everything is. Simple. information is very little very silly” (Interview 4 in Farhat, 2007: 128-132, transcriber’s punctuation). A third student described the pointless English courses she studied at University and referred to the situation as “problematic” because English is taught in the same way as it is taught school with a primary focus on grammar. She reported that the problem lies in

studying English itself.... a secondary subject not a main subject? So this is the main problem...in general. It’s not that good one. something I have to pass. nothing else. Did not help me a lot” (Student Interview 3 in Farhat, 2007: 128-131, transcriber’s punctuation)

Although there is no classification of “main” and “secondary” subjects in the university curriculum, students were assertive in giving English in the curriculum a secondary status compared to other content subjects. The perceptions of English as “useless” were not thoroughly addressed in the MA study which I do believe need research to better understand why English is perceived in that negative way.

The ESP teachers who were interviewed were one of the first Syrian government-sponsored groups to do an MA in ESP in UK institutions. They talked about issues such as: “learning” and “learners” of ESP inside the university culture, compared with outside it, as being two extremely different experiences due to learners’ negative attitudes to English taught in the university. Two ESP teachers, with MAs in ESP, were keen on alerting the university to the need for ESP teaching in Tishreen University hoping

that there will be an ESP Centre but not only for business. We need to have ESP centre...because we need all the different purposes and needs for our students. (Teacher interview 4 in Farhat, 2007:113, transcriber’s punctuation)

In Tishreen University, there is not yet a separate unit for ESP within the Higher Institute of Languages although ESP teaching is ongoing. This could indicate that ESP teachers themselves place a high value on the diverse “purposes” for learning English which reiterates the emphasis on “specific” in English for Specific Purposes, a label that distinguishes ESP from other ELT branches and may be seen as a boundary that limits the purpose of learning itself. In a similar vein, there seem to be a view that a
qualification in ESP is a passport to claim being a “qualified” teacher who can efficiently design ESP materials to meet learner needs. For instance, one teacher seemed very confident about the ESP qualifications she had gained from a UK institution and reported ESP teaching as being “much more enjoyable” than general English teaching. She commented:

because of the MA I had in ESP, I know how to deal with the students. I know what to teach and what to learn from the students. I know how to deal with the students. I know how to get deeper into the information presented in the textbook. (Teacher interviewee 5 ibid: 114, transcriber’s punctuation)

The findings of my MA study alerted me to the importance of closely looking at issues other than materials design, although I have to acknowledge that it also helped me learn tools to design materials based on “learner needs” which are effective at preserving the status quo. However, my MA, alongside earlier ESP studies in Syria which fit in “mainstream” ESP, did not seem to offer any responses to the problems I experienced in my initial ESP teaching experience. Hence, this does not seem to help understand or change the ESP status quo which I described earlier as the “discomfort zone” in which students’ resistance and dissatisfaction of ESP teachers are unexplored and thus demand further research. On the surface of it, the adoption of ESP seems to offer wonderful new opportunities for students and teachers but the reality we experience in ESP practice is problematic. However, it seems that the adoption of ESP in Tishreen University created a network of problems and dissatisfaction rather than solving pre-existing ones.

Having this professional concern which I experienced as an ESP teacher in Tishreen University, which remained unexplained in my MA study, I now endeavour to understand the origins of these problems and unpick the factors that contribute to the current ESP situation. Rather than by replicating needs-analysis and course design studies, I look back at the history of ESP to find out if the problem may be with ESP itself.

1.3 Mainstream ESP: A historical perspective

ESP is clearly not the property of the English-speaking world, nor is it taking place solely in English-speaking countries. In ESP, English is the property of its users, native and non-native speakers alike, something that was called for some years ago by Larry Smith (1987) in his discussions of the use of English as an international language. (Paltridge, 2009:1)
ESP is just one branch of EFL/ESL which all fall under the umbrella of English Language Teaching (ELT). ESP is used in this study in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context where it has strong roots, in particular, in the oil states of the Gulf. I borrow Hutchinson and Waters’ tree of ELT (1987) to best demonstrate the divisions in ELT which is divided into various branches based on the purposes or functions for which English is taught or learned.

![Diagram of ELT tree]

Figure 1: The tree of ELT (Hutchinson & Water, 1987, p.17)

As nothing happens in a vacuum, looking at the tree above, one may think about what led to the emergence of this various-branched ESP from the broader EFL. In this section, the origins of ESP and its key development stages are reviewed in an attempt to find what it is in ESP that may have contributed to the problematic ESP situation in Tishreen University. Tracing the history of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) back to its beginning in the 1960s, Hutchinson and Waters (1987) identify three key factors that influenced the ESP world’s emergence as “specialised language learning”. They claim this was brought about firstly by the demands of a brave new world after the end of the Second World War in 1945. This was an “age of enormous and unprecedented
expansion in scientific, technical and economic activity on an international scale” (p.6). As the United States was the most powerful player in the post-war economic boom, English became “the accepted international language of technology and commerce” and people from different walks of life (for example businessmen and women, mechanics, doctors) started to learn the language because they “needed English and, most importantly, they knew why they needed it” (ibid). The Oil Crises in the early 1970s amplified the flow of money and expertise from the West to the oil-rich countries (mainly in the Gulf region) which pursued accessing technology which was a Western property. English suddenly became a “commodity” in this commerce-dominated age (p.7).

Secondly, there was a revolution in linguistics. With the work of Widdowson (1987), the aim of traditional applied linguistics began to move away from a particular focus on features of language towards understanding language use in various real contexts. This idea of language variations in different settings influenced the idea of developing English courses tailored to specific learner needs that could be “identified by analysing the linguistic characteristics of their specialist area of work or study” (p.8). Early work in ESP comprised research into the varieties of scientific and technical English in the area of English for Science and Technology (EST). The prominent notable early work according to Hutchinson & Waters (1987:7), appeared in the late 1960s and early 1970s included that of Barber (1962) on the nature of Scientific English, and also the work of Ewer & Latorre (1969), Swales (1971), and Selinker & Trimble (1976) on descriptions of written scientific and technical English.

Thirdly; there arose a focus on the learner, influenced by the field of educational psychology, (e.g., Rogers, 1969) which witnessed an approach to learning in which learning is seen as significant when it has relevance to students’ own purposes and when it takes place through ‘doing’. Thus, ESP rose to become more learner-centred and the focus shifted towards “the learners and their attitudes to learning” and “led to the development of courses in which ‘relevance’ to the learners’ needs and interests was paramount” (Hutchinson & Waters (1978:8). The most notable development in this phase was Munby’s (1978) model for Needs Analysis in syllabus design.
1.3.1 Applied linguistic phase

There are two stages in this phase namely; register analysis and rhetorical/discourse analysis. With register analysis, in the mid-1960s to the early 1970s, the early EST research consisted of identifying lexical and grammatical features in scientific English texts. The period features the work of Barber (1962), Strevens (Halliday, McIntosh & Strevens, 1964), Ewer (Ewer & Latorre, 1969), and Swales (1971). Research in this phase aimed at the analysis of different registers of the different Englishes (Electrical Engineering, Biology, etc.). The analyses were based on identifying “the grammatical and lexical features of these registers” so that ‘teaching materials then took these linguistics features as their syllabus’ (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987:10). Ewer and Latorre’s *A Course in Basic Scientific English* (1969) is an example of a textbooks based on register analysis whose “main motive…was the pedagogic one of making the ESP course more relevant to learners’ needs”; in other words, the analysis remained linguistic in nature based on learners’ linguistic needs (ibid).

The second phase of ESP development during the 1970s coincided with the “revolution” in linguistics. This rhetorical/discourse analysis phase was driven by interest in the field of discourse or rhetorical analysis moving research into “special language” beyond the sentence-level. According to Hutchinson & Waters, “attention shifted to understanding how sentences were combined in discourse to produce meaning… to identify the organisational patterns in text and to specify the linguistic means by which these patterns are signalled” (1987:11). Key researchers in this approach included Widdowson (1974) in Britain and contributors from the Washington School in the United States including Selinker and Trimble (1976) and Lackstrom (Lackstrom, Selinker & Trimble, 1973) who provided a Rhetorical Process Chart for EST that describes EST paragraph development at four discourse levels (A-D) classifying different rhetorical purposes and choices. Typical classroom rhetoric-analysis based syllabi are the “Focus” series (Allen & Widdowson, 1974) and the “Nucleus” series (Bates & Dudley-Evans, 1976). However, the functional/notional approach to syllabus was questioned later by Robinson (1980) who challenged Widdowson’s ideas on the basis that knowledge is assumed to be separate from language. It was also challenged by Swales (1988:72) who viewed knowledge as being “influenced by national, social, cultural, technical, educational, and religious expectations and inspirations”. In other words, there is more to ESP than language in this respect and this springs to mind the earlier studies in ESP in Syria including my
MA dissertation which addressed the linguistics element of ESP dismissing other factors such as the ones mentioned by Swales which, if explored, may help understand the origin of the ‘conflict’ in ESP at Tishreen University which adopts a mainstream ESP approach.

1.3.2 Towards needs analysis phase

There are five development levels featuring the needs analysis phase. In the first one, target situation analysis, embraced a sociolinguistic model for defining the content of ESP programmes. Munby, a dominant figure at this stage, produced a model for Needs Analysis that comprises a set of parameters to define target learner needs and which he called the Communication Needs Processor (CNP) in his Communicative Syllabus Design (1978). Munby pointed to the great importance of a ‘more systematic attention’ to the “communication needs of the learner, especially the derivational relationship of syllabus specification to such needs” (Munby, 1978: 1). Hutchinson and Waters used Chambers’ (1980) term of ‘target situation analysis’ instead of needs analysis as the most accurate in the “‘coming of age’ for ESP” in which the target situation or the end product in which learners will use the language, is identified and the linguistic features of that situation are rigorously analysed with a focus on learner need in the process of course design (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987:12). Despite the fact that these stages seemed a significant development in ESP, “it proved in the event to be a false dawn” due to needs analysis being based an oversimplistic definition of needs when a broader concept of needs is required (ibid) (needs analysis and its problematisation are further discussed in 1.4.2.

The second stage of skills and strategies, a skill-centred approach to ESP syllabus design was an attempt to go beyond the surface of language to understand “the thinking processes that underlie language use” (Hutchinson& Waters, 1987:13). It is grounded in the idea that “underlying all language use there are common reasoning and interpreting processes, which, regardless of the surface forms, enable us to extract meaning from discourse” (ibid). Hence, the lack of focus on register had no significance in this approach as the underlying interpretive process, using strategies like guessing the meaning of words from their context, using visual layout to determine text type, etc., is not specific to one particular register. No key figure was dominant but some work on

In the third stage, the learner-centred approach, Hutchinson & Waters (1987) argued that the stages of register analysis, rhetorical/discourse analysis, target situation analysis, and skills and strategies were “fundamentally flawed, in that they are all based in descriptions of language use” with too much concentration on the linguistic end product, and ignoring the skills needed by students to reach this end. Hutchinson & Waters argued that the origin of ESP is linked to the need for a focus on the learner and ‘language learning’, which ESP had discarded up to this stage (p.14). In 1987, they developed a learning-centred approach to ESP based on their view that

> learning is not just a mental process, it is a process of negotiation between individuals and society. Society sets the target and the individuals must do their best to get as close to that target as possible (or reject it). (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987:72)

Hutchinson and Waters (1987) replaced the “learner-centred” approach with the “learning-centred” with the focus not only on what learners do with the language but also how they learn it, encouraging learner engagement and participation as one component, among more others, in the learning process. Their belief in the impracticality of the “learner-centred” approach to course design is because “since most learning takes place within institutionalised systems, it is difficult to see how such an approach could be taken, as it more or less rules out predetermined syllabuses, materials, etc.” (p. 72). The ESP course design is illustrated next showing the three components of an ESP course design including needs analysis, learning theories informing the teaching methodology, and syllabus content.
Hutchinson and Waters’ (1987) argument was that the emphasis on needs analysis and language analysis was not a good way in which to inform pedagogy, which is about teaching and learning. Needs analysis is about content and so too is language. How these are learnt have been and still are forgotten, because academic researchers have little interest in pedagogy. In my present study of ESP in the 21st century, the crucial criticism of “mainstream” ESP by Hutchinson and Waters who are regarded as radical by many in the profession is very important as the “learning” side of ESP is mainly neglected in previous understandings of ESP in Tishreen University and thus it demands further investigation.

In the fourth development stage, the era was characterised by *genre analysis* (1990) and the establishment of *English for Specific Purposes Journal* (1980) which is “unique as a journal in ESP that it is international in its interests, covers all branches of the subject, and is relatively well-established as a journal in the discipline of applied linguistics (Hewings, 2002). That movement indicated moving text analysis in ESP activity a stage further; to genre analysis. Genre analysis is an approach still dominant today and is primarily associated with the seminal work of Swales (1990) on the research article genre. Swales defines genre as “a distinctive category of discourse of any type, spoken or written, with or without literary aspirations” (Swales, 1990:33). Creating a Research Space model (CARS) has been influential on genre analysis in ESP and on teaching academic writing. It features the Moves and Steps the academic writer

![Figure 2: Factors affecting ESP course design (Hutchinson & Water, 1987, p22)](image-url)
uses in his/her research article introduction to justify his research and contribution to knowledge through establishing the research topic, summarising previous research, indicating a gap and announcing present research and findings. While Swales’ work centres on the research article, Bhatia (1993) examines business and legal texts. Bhatia labels genre analysis and register and rhetorical analysis as discourse analysis but with two different functions. Register/rhetorical analysis is a discourse description that “concentrates on the linguistic aspects of text construction and interpretation” while genre analysis “goes beyond such a description to rationalise conventional aspects of genre construction and interpretation” (p.2). This textual and linguistic-oriented approach seems to dismiss the “learning” and departs from ESP pedagogy and its main claim of preparing learners for the use of language in the real world profession.

Finally, in the late 1990s which is the modern age of ESP, no one view dominated in discussions of ESP as in earlier times with Register Analysis, Discourse and Rhetorical Analysis, Skills-Based Approaches and the Learner-Centred Approach. Materials production and text analysis, of both written and spoken discourse, still dominated ESP. Analysis of spoken and written texts, especially under the influence of Genre Analysis (1990), has assumed an important position in ESP (Dudley Evans & St. John, 1998:30). With the advent of corpus studies (basically centred on the lexico-grammatical patterning of texts rather than functional, rhetorical textlinguistic aspects (Flowerdew, 1998) and the development of genre studies, register analysis returned to prominence because of the possibility of generating quantitative data from computer analysis discoursal features of specific texts (Dudley Evans & St John, 1998:30 31). Corpus-linguistics research has contributed to the development of ESP through the compilation of corpus of lexis and lexico-grammatical patterns which “formulate linguistic generalisations usually correlated with specific functions, and explore linguistic variation, in and across ESP texts” (Flowerdew, 2011:223).

The 1990s featured a boom in business English similar to the dominance of EST in earlier ESP history, notably a history of EST in Swales’ (1988) Episodes in ESP (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998). This also, perhaps, is due to the prevailing power in the global economy of “business” and the acceptance of English as the medium for the expanded international business arena (St John, 1996). Hence, participation in this arena will demand personnel with specialised Business English skills to meet the requirements of specific occupational positions. This period witnessed the establishment of Journal of
Second Language Writing (1992) which is devoted to disseminate research and discussions in the second and foreign language writing. Papers which appear in this journal include personal characteristics and attitudes of L2 writers, L2 writers' composing processes, features of L2 writers' texts, readers' responses to L2 writing, assessment/evaluation of L2 writing, contexts (cultural, social, political, institutional) for L2 writing, and any other topic clearly relevant to L2 writing theory, research, or instruction.

2001 marked the establishment of Journal of English for Academic Purposes whose scope encompasses topics including, classroom language, teaching methodology, teacher education, assessment of language, needs analysis; materials development and evaluation, discourse analysis, acquisition studies in EAP contexts, research writing and speaking at all academic levels, the sociopolitics of English in academic uses and language planning.

Genre analysis, corpus analysis and systemic functional linguistics (SFL) continued to influence the development of ESP, still do, and are very unlikely to diminish (Hewings, 2002). Needs analysis and material development is the fourth most researched topic in the ESP academy after genre-analysis, discourse/rhetorical analysis and academic writing. The following graph illustrates a review of research topic coverage in the prominent international journal of English for Specific Purposes, in the last decade 2001-2011.

![Figure 3: Topic focus in Journal of ESP (ESPj) between 2001-2011](image)
Although genre analysis remains “the most evolved and most sophisticated in ESP” (Belcher, Johns & Paltridge, 2011:3), teachers and discourse/genre analysts were criticised for failure to address a major problem students encounter in professional settings when they have to use the language in their profession, represented in the failure to raise awareness “of the discursive realities of the professional world” because of the approach which “treat(s) professional genres as simply textual artefacts” (Bhatia, 1993, 1994; Swales, 1990).

To sum up, ESP, since its emergence as a distinct field in the 1960s as a response to the Oil Crisis, has established a tradition that has been concerned with developing the appropriate pedagogy through the analysis of specific language discourses and learners needs (Swales, 1988). In other words, it was business and it continues to be viewed as a “commodity”, technology was sold and language was part of the “package” to Iran and Arabian Gulf countries which needed English to access advances in technology which was Western-oriented. ESP in its early history was linguistics-centred and has mainly centred upon curricular issues including course design, curriculum development, and needs analysis. Munby’s (1978) needs analysis has been marketed and attention was directed towards linguistically-based material production so research has revolved around “needs analysis, text analysis, and preparing learners to communicate effectively in the tasks prescribed by their study or work situation” (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998: 1). Having this characteristic, ESP practitioners in the academy are required to “collect empirical needs-assessment data, to create or adapt materials to meet specific needs identified, and to cope with often unfamiliar subject matter...” (Belcher, 2004:166). “Mainstream” ESP which is still a strongly dominant approach is a content-focused (language) and goals-focused (needs) and these lead the endeavour while learning is neglected. Although there is an obsession with “material development” (part of the “culture” of ESP with its origin in situations for which no teaching materials existed), the pedagogy of ESP is little different in the “mainstream” from English as a foreign language (EFL). The notion of “purposes” has tended to be linked to goals and therefore “needs”. However, it remains problematic how ‘needs’ or “purposes” are oversimplified in this tradition. As of the ESP situation at Tishreen University, the adoption of such an approach which is linguistic and needs-based still does not offer an understanding of the network of “problems” experienced including students’ demotivation and resistance to in-house English courses and dissatisfaction of ESP
teachers. Therefore, my attempt at understanding the situation from a “mainstream” perspective is not successful.

1.4 ESP: An alternative critical approach

After the completion of my MA, I went to Exeter University for my PhD (2008) bringing to my research the basic ESP knowledge I described in section 1.3 and which informed my MA dissertation. Mainstream ESP had not helped me understand the situation and I sensed I reached a ‘dead end’. At Exeter University, I was introduced to critical approaches to TESOL taught in their Ed.D programme and which I audited out of interest. I became particularly fascinated by Benesch’s (2001) *Critical English for Academic Purpose* in which EAP is problematised, drawing upon a critical pedagogy and which proposes "rights analysis" as a critical counterpart to “needs analysis”, allowing for a democratic environment of negotiation and open possibilities in the classroom. It was at this juncture when I decided to go beyond “mainstream” ESP which sounds unsatisfactory in providing an understanding of the complicated ESP situation at Tishreen University especially in the Faculty of Medicine. As my personal teaching experience demonstrates, “mainstream” ESP appears to have created problems and complicated the situation rather than upgrading the level of ESP teaching and learning in a university. “Mainstream” ESP seems to still enjoy its place over the critical approach to EAP which was received with scepticism. EAP is the main home of this critical trend which does not appeal to many policy makers. However, I find that several issues have come out of critical approaches to TESOL and Critical English for Academic Purposes (CEAP) which are of interest and may give insights into taking a more critical view of ESP to rethink “mainstream” ESP in order to understand the particular ESP learning situation in my university. One of them is the view that sees ideology and pedagogy as interchangeably constructed in the TESOL/ESP field including problematisation of notions such as ‘neutrality’ of English and ‘universalism’, ‘power’, ‘needs analysis’ within which ESP has long been rooted, and the notion of ‘identity’.
1.4.1 Pedagogy and ideology in English language teaching: Pragmatism and critical pragmatism

Tishreen University follows a “mainstream” ESP accommodationist view of EAP which accommodates students to institutional requirements and therefore restrict learners and teachers, thus, maintaining the status quo without questioning ESP practices in faculties such as the Faculty of Medicine. In this section, I present key insights from the critical approach to EAP which I find useful to help me understand the problems I raised in my own ESP context at Tishreen University. In particular, the critique of discourse of neutrality in EAP, the “functional” aspect of needs in the construct English for Academic Purposes, and marginalisation of ESP can best help unpicking the elements of the “discomfort zone”, especially students’ resistance to ESP courses.

In recent studies on education development, critical learning or learning to critique tended to take over other approaches especially in higher education (Kiely, 2001:1). In English for academic purposes (EAP), the issues and challenges of the critical dimension have been engaged at theoretical and practical levels (Lea & Street, 1998; Benesch, 2001; Hyland & Hamp-Lyons, 2002). As EAP is an applied linguistics field, the primary reason for the inclusion of this element is derived from the work in critical linguistics and critical discourse analysis fields where understanding texts are set against analysing implicit factors (Benesch, 2001; Fairclough, 1995).

Throughout its history, EAP has been influenced by linguistics, applied linguistics, sociolinguistics, communicative language teaching, writing across the curriculum, learning theory, and genre studies. In the last 10 years, it echoed Pennycook’s (2001) critical approach to TESOL, which draws upon work in critical literacies. Critical applied linguistics (CAL) emerged as a way of thinking that rejects the traditional misconceptions about the complex political and ethical implications of language practices and the “positivistic ideals of neutrality and prioritisation of efficiency and applicability” (Kabel, 2009:14). Instead, in Pennycook’s definition (2001: 90), CAL is “applied linguistics with an attitude”. It is “problematisation of the given, constant scepticism, and constant questioning of the normative assumptions of applied linguistics”. In other words, it is making applied linguistics “more politically accountable” (ibid). Taking the problematisation line implies the abandonment of structuralism where practices end up with generalisations and the focus becomes on “situatedness” of any language or educational case to question its issues, methods, conflicts, and power dynamics in its own way (Carlson, 2004: 177).
In the early 1990s, Benesch (1993) and Pennycook (1994a, 1994b) initiated a new challenging discourse in the field of applied linguistics, ESL and EAP which primarily critiqued the “pragmatism” (not meant in the epistemological sense but the functional sense) which dominated the field and which was by and large “a dominant and largely unquestioned discourse or ideology in itself” asserting “a conservative stance towards dominant academic and sociopolitical orders” and aspiring to “change students to fit them into existing structures, thereby perpetuating mainstream academic culture” (Allison, 1996: 85-86).

The emphasis on curriculum and instruction at the expense of research and theory in the ESP/EAP fields triggered later work which echoed critical applied linguistics ideologies (Benesch, 2001). In the last three decades there has been a growing number of debates on EAP issues of which the most heated are those between L2 compositionists, whose view of ESL writing courses are general purpose-oriented and EAP specialists who advocate teaching discipline-specific genres to help students become better writers. The second debate revolved on ideology; the political implications of EAP’s pragmatic approach to research and teaching (ibid: 36). The early work of Phillipson’s (1992) “ideology of political purity” and Benesch’s (1998) “ideology of pragmatism” ignited the questioning the political quietism of the language teaching context. They urged the need for discussions of “funding, curricular choices, roles ascribed to teachers and students, and the goals of English teachings in institutions and societies” (Benesch, 2001:41). Following earlier studies (e.g. Prior, 1988; Lea & Street, 1998; Turner, 1999) which challenged the academic “discourse of neutrality” and the homogeneity of academic writing, Benesch challenges the assumptions and pragmatism of current EAP practice, the promotion of EAP as “service English” (Swales, 1989) and the status of EAP teachers at the bottom of the academic hierarchy (Johns, 1990).

EAP’s ideology of “vulgar pragmatism”, as Benesch and Pennycook argued, needs to be replaced by “critical pragmatism” as it is a disservice to EAP students. “Vulgar pragmatism” accommodates EAP students to the demands of the academic institutions and “restricts possibilities of changing unfavourable conditions” (Benesch, 2001:41-42). They called for a critical pragmatism

a position that is deeply concerned about efforts to maintain the status quo, and insists that while we do have to get on with our teaching, we also have to think very seriously about the broader implications of everything we do.

(Pennycook, 1997:266)
Pragmatism is concerned with applications and solutions to problems, efficacy, efficiency, and problem solving (Creswell, 2007:22). It deems difficult and impossible to ask “what it should work for and who should have a say in determining the latter” (Biesta, 2007:4). Alongside this pragmatic view (i.e. ideologically neutral) of EAP, it was recognised that EAP worked “for rather than with subject specialists” and thus ignored “students’ cultures, and a reluctance to critically engage with the values of institutional goals and practices” (Hyland & Hamp-Lyons, 2002:3). In the end, “education is a moral practice, rather than a technical one” (Biesta, 2007:7).

The alternative critical EAP with the dominance of an ideologist discourse in EAP was criticised on the basis that the field will be dominated by discussions of issues of ideology and politics at the expense of other necessities for theories and approaches (Allison, 1994:416). However, there is some reference in mainstream EAP literature to the interest in critical perspective. Some key figures who chronicled EAP’s history through their accounts of curriculum development in particular settings, gauged some interest in the critical perspective. For example, Dudley-Evans & St. John (1998:230), acknowledge the marginalisation of ESP in the academy and its “professionalisation as a self-standing field” affected by the “non-theoretical ‘here we go’ attitude”. They see the role of ESP as not just accommodating institutional requirements but also questioning them. Nonetheless, they seem to be very conservative of “how far we should go in questioning practices departments and institutions” (ibid).

Benesch (1996) argued for the need for a critical approach to needs analysis in EAP. A curricular focus on providing students only with academic-linguistic skills for dealing with academic work in other disciplines misses a crucial opportunity to help students to develop forms of linguistic, social and cultural criticism that would be of much greater benefit to them for understanding and questioning how language works both within and outside educational institutions. In a similar vein, Pennycook (1997:263) objects to the view of EAP as a neutral service industry to the academy, distanced from social, cultural, political and ideological concerns. Rather than apparently meeting the “needs” of the students (as is often claimed after applying some form of “needs analysis”), a belief in the educational neutrality of EAP may do a pedagogical disservice to the students.

With the increased spread of English as a global language, a wave of critical awareness hit the field of ELT in general and EAP in particular (Phillipson, 1992; Canagarajah,
The critical awareness reminds us that EAP instruction itself is not a politically neutral activity. English is ideological and critical pedagogies in EAP is a seedbed for students’ reflection on the foreign academic culture (Canagarajah, 1999). In contrast with those who view English as an international language as neutral (Kachru, 1986), Pennycook (1997) alerts us to the need to go beyond “an unproblematic relationship between “English” and the “academic purposes” for which it is used” (p. 257). The dangers of the discourse of neutrality especially in EAP which is evident in the construct “English for academic purposes” which imbeds ‘functional’ needs. From a poststructural view of language, he views language as a social practice (1994b). English can no longer be neutral in the internationalised world where it is “a global commodity to be bought and sold on the world market” and the English language teachers and students are “freely traded within this global free market economy” and mostly perceived as a service industry with products and consumers (Pennycook, 1997: 259).

Issues of power seem to be the locus of raising students’ critical awareness of institutional equalities through the language itself (Pennycook, 1997; Benesch, 2001). This critical approach goes in harmony with work in critical language awareness and critical discourse analysis where language and discourse (social practice) are constructed by social and ideological relations (see Fairclough 1992, 1995). Clark (1992:118) urges us to “critically explore with the students the notion of academic discourse community and how it is that certain forms of knowledge and ways of telling that knowledge have evolved in the way they have” (p. 118) and Pennycook (1997) suggests the “possibility of pluralisation” of knowledge and academic writing norms. This way of thinking will enable “teachers to help students to create and become aware of alternative ways of envisioning the world” and could be implemented in an EAP context by “developing course content that sought to critically examine the discourses that construct our and our students’ understandings of our worlds” and by “curricular focus on particular relationships between English and certain discourses” (Pennycook, 1997:264). Pennycook (1994b) also focused on the “worldliness of English” and opened up new ways of critically understanding of the role of English as an international language in order to examine different teaching contexts to examine the relationship between the discourse of English and discourses of science, technology and education. Integrating this critical approach with an EAP curriculum sounds problematic as we run the risk of depriving students of access to academic language and
discourse. This dilemma is discussed by Clark (1992:135) who highlights “the tensions between students’ obligations and rights, the need on the one hand to adhere to the norms of the academic community, and on the other to challenge those norms”.

Hyland and Hamp-Lyons (2002:9) pose the following questions that frame the new bid on EAP research and teaching which encourages us to explore new ways of looking at EAP:

Do we see our role as developing students’ academic literacy skills to facilitate their effective participation in academic communities? Or do we have a responsibility to interrogate our theoretical and pedagogic assumptions and provide learners with ways of examining the academic socio-political status quo to critique these cultural and linguistic resources? Put simply, is the EAP teacher’s job to replicate and reproduce existing forms of discourse (and thus power relations) or to develop an understanding of them so they can be challenged?

Benesch (2001) has suggested that the study of these issues in classroom might be best enacted by framing it in terms of ‘rights analysis’ which she introduces as a reaction to conformity to institutional requirements. Target situations can be negotiated and rearranged with the encouragement of students’ engagement. Nonetheless, despite awareness of the relationships between language and power and of inequalities, classrooms are still constrained by institutional contexts and teachers continue to work as instructors in service units and “ways of facilitating change in such environments remain to be explored” (Hyland & Hamp-Lyons, 2002: 9-10). We still need, as Luke (1997: 334) stated, more complex theories about language and power than those offered by the “genres of power” argument, since this ultimately “runs the risk of becoming an institutional technology principally engaged in self-reproduction of the status and privilege of a particular field of disciplinary knowledge”.

A conceptualisation of Critical English for Academic Purposes (CEAP) politicises the neutral ideologies and raises awareness of unequal conditions EAP students may face in the institutions. As Rancière (1991) puts it, “every institution is an explication in social act, a dramatisation of inequality” (cited in Law, 2009: 297). CEAP helps students articulate and formalise their resistance, to participate more democratically as members of an academic community and in the larger society (Benesch, 2001, emphasis added). CEAP teachers do not anticipate “what might emerge but are prepared to help students enact their reactions in a thoughtful, cooperative, and communitarian fashion” (ibid:
62). It allows teachers and students to examine externally imposed demands and negotiate their responses to them, by addressing the following questions:

Who formulated these requirements and why? Should they be fulfilled? Should they be modified? What are the consequences of trying to change current conditions? What is gained by obeying, and what is lost? (Benesch, 2001:53)

Be it for students or teachers, the critical approach inspired new ways of conceptualisation of EAP. It focuses attention on the combination of needs and rights for EAP students to engage them in negotiating the “impersonal and unfamiliar demands of universities in their second or additional language” (Morgan, 2009: 86). Similarly, the concept of “rights” engages EAP teachers in critical pedagogies and shifts their traditional role as agents of knowledge transfer (ibid).

1.4.2 Needs and its critique

The aforementioned critical issues urge us to rethink “needs” which has been a key concept in the development of ESP and an effective tool in ESP curriculum design since Munby’s (1978) Needs Analysis model. The term “analysis of needs” was first coined by Michael West in 1920s in India in his attempt to answer “why learners should learn English and how they should learn English” (cited in Howard & Brown, 1997:68). The term did not come back to light until the advent of the situation analysis (Richterich, 1972). Richterich models the situations in which learners of a foreign language might be involved, the possible roles they might play, and the types of communicative activities they might participate in. A later more elaborate version of this model is target-situation analysis (Munby, 1978) noted earlier (in Howatt & Widdowson, 2004: 339). Other approaches are deficiency needs analysis or assessment of the “learning gap” (West, 1997, p. 71) - a combined process of present and target needs analysis and strategy analysis which incorporates the learner’s view on how and what strategies to use when learning a language (Allwright, 1982). Allwright was the first to distinguish between needs (wants), and lacks (deficiency) which Hutchinson & Waters (1987) adopted later in their approach to learning needs analysis. Means analysis was also proposed by Holliday & Cooke (1982) to consider “classroom culture and the management infrastructure and culture” in the needs analysis process as because “what works well in one situation may not work in another” (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998:124).
Needs analysis has always been the principal method in traditional EAP/ESP course design to identify the required academic skills and genre-specific discourse that might help NNS students in their academic study, research, or specific discipline courses (Johns & Dudley-Evans 1991; Robinson 1991).

However important it is, needs analysis has been critiqued in several ways which I will move on to discuss. By adhering to “needs” which has a biological connotation of the human basic needs, we are naturalising institutional requirements and students needs and accept them as “not just normal but also immutable” (Benesch, 2001:6). Needs analysis is descriptive in the sense that it highlights “what is expected of students, not what might happen if their wishes were elicited and acted on” (Benesch, 1999: 315).

In the critique of needs, Lawy and Armstrong (2009:3) challenged the myth associated with needs, and “objective reality” and defined it based on Lumby and Wilson (2003:536) as “an internalised compulsion, a feeling of being impelled to act in some way, and also an external perception that there is something lacking, which, if not rectified, will lead to detriment” (Lawy & Armstrong 2009:4). This brings to mind Biesta’s (2007) similar view of education as a “commodity” where the learner is the “consumer” and the teacher is the “provider” who is in charge of meeting needs (p.74). Thus, learning becomes “a rational choice in which learners contemplate their educational options and make choices”, very similar to purchase of commodities from the market (Lawy & Armstrong, 2009:5). According to Armstrong (1982:33), needs are “susceptible to change over time and are likely to be different for each individual” (cited in Lawy & Armstrong, 2009: 6-7).

Alongside mythologising the notion of need, needs analysis in ESP has been critiqued from a number of perspectives; these issues are summarised by Basturkmen (2006:19-20). The most significant ones for consideration regarding ESP programmes at Tishreen University are listed below to understand how “needs analysis” can contribute to the frustration and demotivation of students at Tishreen University and their resistance to the predetermined needs –based courses.

**Linguistic problem/ unreliable language.** One critique of needs in ESP is based on the limited view of language that ESP espouses and its failure to consider the unpredictability of language use in specific situations due to the variation of language use that exists in any target situation. Munby’s Communicative Needs Processor (1978) model is a good example of this rigidity which determines not
only the English language functions that would be needed in a particular situation but also the actual linguistic formula for realising these functions in particular environments.

Unreliable informants. Learners as informants in the language needs analysis process cannot be a reliable source of information due to their lack of awareness or metalanguage to determine their linguistic needs. Learners are expected to have unsophisticated knowledge about language so it is unrealistic to expect them to make sound decisions about their needs (Chambers, 1980), especially if they are relatively unfamiliar with the job they are to perform or subject they are to study in the future (Long, 1996).

Other sources of information are institutions who have rigid expectations and limited understandings about the students’ needs and what they should be able to do after the course. This can best be seen to serve the interest of the institutions, in most cases, at the expense of the learners themselves (Auerbach, 1995). Institutions often attempt, through needs analysis, to get others to conform to established communicative practices of linguistically privileged groups (Benesch, 2001).

Curriculum problems. Reliance on needs analysis in the process of ESP course design may lead to language training (know how) rather than language education (know why). The generative basis of language goes missing when learners are trained to perform a restricted repertoire of a particular target situation so that their performance in the language corresponds with a limited linguistic competence (Widdowson, 1983).

Needs itself appears to be fluid in a number of ways. Language needs are distinct from learning needs. If learners need to learn a particular target language, this does not necessarily mean they are ready to acquire it (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987).

Multiple perspectives of needs (e.g., learners’, institutions’) make the task harder for the needs analyst to decide whose perspectives to take into account in designing ESP courses (Jasso-Aguilar, 1999).

Moreover, as West argues, “any system of needs analysis is related to the theory of the nature of language” (West, 1994: 2). Hence, different needs analysts may
base their needs analysis on different linguistic descriptions such as language functions, syntactic features or lexical items used in a particular target situation.

Objective needs are not necessarily the same as subjective needs or wants. Students may need to learn a language for a particular profession-related purpose but may at the same time want to learn a language for broader purposes. The fluid definition of needs is problematic and the attempt to fit students into a particular needs-based course may cause frustration and demotivation. (Basturkmen, 2006:19).

1.4.3 Critical needs analysis (rights analysis)

The critique of the myth of meeting needs “recognises the multiplicity of meanings that can be attached to the notion of need” (Lawy & Armstrong 2009:14). Benesch visualised the term “needs” through a new lens where she replaced “needs” with “rights” as an indication of a more explicit political orientation. In her view, “needs” holds a psychological connotation of what the academic institution requires of them. It, hence, “conflates the private world of desire and the public world of requirements, rules, and regulations. It implies that students will be fulfilled if they follow the rules” (Benesch, 2001:61). Benesch has proposed a new method—“rights analysis” that goes beyond fulfilling content class requirements which seems an “insufficient goal” to open the “possibility that students might view these assignments as unreasonable, poorly conceptualised, unclear, and so on”. In other words, rights analysis is “a way to conceptualise EAP teaching as more than initiating students unquestioningly into academic discourse communities” (ibid: 6). It goes beyond a “means-end functional rationality” of needs analysis which is bound to meeting “a set of specific outcomes or goals” (Lawy & Armstrong, 2009:15).

In contrast with “needs”, “rights” highlight the contested nature of academic life and the power exerted by different participants for different ends. Unlike needs, they are “political” and “negotiable” and they “conceptualise more democratic participation for all members of an academic community” (ibid). Nonetheless, there is no particular pre-existing set of rights to claim, although rights, in the English language classroom, operate within a tight administrative framework (Akbari, 2008: 645). In critical EAP, they are not seen as artefacts of the Greek model of democratic citizenship, an individualistic notion of male participation and power (Luke, 1992). They “are
contingent, depending on the local context and histories of the participants in a particular course” (Benesch, 2001: 62). Therefore, the move towards Critical English Academic Purposes takes into account both needs and rights but also aims at widening the scope of academic purposes to incorporate the socio-political context of teaching and learning. Its novel issue is the consideration of the hierarchical arrangements in EAP institutions and configuration of power relations among different participants in a given context both in and outside the classroom (Benesch, 2009:1). Rights analysis implies “possibilities for change” (Benesch, 1999:325), “possibility for engagement” and “assumes that each academic situation offers its own opportunities for negotiation, depending on local conditions and on the current political climate both inside and outside the educational institution” (Benesch, 2001:62). In the “dual focus of compliance and resistance”, Benesch argued drawing on Auerbach (1991) and Peirce (1989), students are given the opportunity to choose what they “accept” or “challenge” in the course; to “weigh their choice and voice their opposition, if they choose to” (Benesch, 1999:326). The above discussion of CEAP is done to highlight notions of reference to my present study such as “resistance” demonstrated by students at Tishreen University without the introduction of CEAP. This was briefly demonstrated earlier in my reflection on my teaching experience in 1.2. “Power” is another notion which this “rights analysis” frame and it addresses questions like “what are the explicit and implicit regulations in a particular setting? How do students respond to these regulations?” (Benesch, 2001: 62). In Tishreen University, as illustrated in 1.1.2, not only students appeared to resist the imposed English courses, but the ESP teachers, including myself, are being subject to power exercise and therefore being treated as second class citizens in the Medical Faculty.

1.4.4 Identity in ESP

The last important issue from the critical perspective, which is of relevance to the present study, is the exploration of the notion of identity. The concept of students’ “rights analysis” with the focus on learners’ rights and desires has drawn the attention of researchers in the field of ESP to the notion of identity construction, negotiation and representation in written and spoken academic discourse within the subfield of EAP (Paltridge & Starfield, 2011:112).
Identity has been theorised from sociopsychological perspective (cf. Tajfel, 1974), sociolinguistics (cf. Gumperz, 1986) and postmodern feminist poststructuralist (cf. Weedon, 1987). It has been a central construct in social sciences and applied linguistics over the past 40 years since Bonny Norton Peirce (1995) criticised SLA and called for “a comprehensive theory of social identity that integrates the learner and the language learning context” (p.12). Peirce (1995) discussed social identity from a poststructuralist perspective, drawing on Weedon’s (1987) work, in particular the notion of ‘subjectivity’ as an alternative contrast to ‘social identity’ which is “the conscious and unconscious thoughts and emotions of the individual, her sense of herself and her ways of understanding her relation to the world” (p. 32) and whose features are, "the multiple nature of the subject; subjectivity as a site of struggle; and subjectivity as changing over time" (p. 15, emphasis added). In particular, the socio-political and socioeconomic forces of globalisation, consumerism, explosion of media technologies and others and its impact on language ideologies and identities led to a new search or new national identities (Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004:2) and hence identity became of interest in linguistic anthropology, sociolinguistics and SLA studies like in bi- and multilingualism (Creese, 2005; Miller, 2003) or in naturalistic contexts (Blackledge, 2000; Nic; Toohey, 2000; Norton, 2001; Pavlenko, 2001, 2002, 2004; Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004; Block, 2006; Nic Craith, 2007).

Most research on identity is grounded in poststructuralist theory with an emphasis on the power relations and social constructivism and focus on the discursive construction of identities in second language context (ESL). The poststructuralist theory was proposed as a framework for researching identity because it “recognises the sociohistorically shaped partiality, contestability, instability, and mutability of ways in which language ideologies and identities are linked to relations of power and political arrangements in communities and societies” (Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004:10). Hence, identities are understood as

social, discursive, and narrative options offered by a particular society in a specific time and place to which individuals and groups of individuals appeal in an attempt to self-name, to self-characterise, and to claim social spaces and social prerogatives. (ibid: 19)

The majority of poststructural identity research is carried out in ESL context (McKay &Wong, 1996; Norton Peirce, 1995, 2000; Pavlenko, 2000, 2002) and unveils the complex relationship between second language learners’ multiple identities which the
reductionist sociopsychological paradigm fails to capture (Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004:6). Studies of foreign language learning and identity construction are scarce. For example, Kinginger (2004:241) suggests that “categories emerging from research on language learning as social practice are people too; people whose history, dispositions towards learning, access to sociocultural worlds, participation, and imagination together shape the qualities of their achievements”.

The notion of identity which is never novel in SLA research (McNamara, 1997) is an important notion being explored in ESP research (Paltridge, 2012:183). Research in identity studies in ESP as reviewed in Paltridge (2012) is relatively small such as Block (2010) and Casanave (2002) where students’ identities are negotiated to increase participation in particular communities of practice. Interest in ESP identity research is growing but seems to be confined within the scope of “needs analysis”. The latest development in ESP identity research is Belcher & Lukkarilla’s (2011) study in which learner needs are given a primary focus in needs analysis in an ESL context so that learner identity can be included in needs analyses (Belcher, Johns & Paltridge, 2011). They reiterate questions that emerged from their study with regards to language roles and learners’ visions of their near and more distant future which requires thorough thinking:

► How often do we, as language teachers, consider that learners may want to do more than be academically or professionally successful in their target language? Maybe they wish they could better express their emotions and share their “core” feelings.
► Do we more narrowly define “purposes” for language use than our students do?
► Does it occur to us that who learners want to be in the present and near future may be very different from who they hope to become in the more distant future? (Belcher & Lukkarila, 2011:88)

Belcher and Lukkarila (2011) suggest that the study of identity can contribute to the development of needs analysis that accounts for the multiple roles of the learners and their vision of the selves in the present and the future. They note that,

This engagement with how learners see themselves is an opportunity to language educators to realise the multiple, unintended limitations that may be imposed on learners through too narrowly conceived needs-based teaching practices. Learner identity data collection ideally encourages us to rethink not only what we offer learners in terms of content (e.g., vocabulary for expressing feelings) but also how we offer that content- the degree to which we support learners’ construction of a vision they have of themselves. (Belcher & Lukkarila, 2011:89-90)
The review of some aspects of the critical perspective developed my thinking about ESP and the possibility of drawing on useful tools (i.e., critique of needs and the notion of identity) from the critical approach to understand the professional concerns at Tishreen University and which I will present next.

1.5 Integration of personal and professional concerns as a rational for the study

Syria, an Arab nationalist country, is neither westernised nor moving towards transforming its education into solely English-medium as in the oil-rich Arabian Gulf states such as the United Arab Emirates (UAE) where English has become the medium of instruction (EMI) in most higher educational institutions (Troudi & Jendli, 2011). It is highly unlikely that education would be English-medium as long as the country is highly influenced by the ideology of Arab nationalism. Although the notion ‘Arab’ is controversially-heavy due to the ethnic diversity in the Syrian society, the ideology of Arab-nationalism emerged to unite people in Syria regardless of their ethnic, religious or linguistic backgrounds and Arabic became the root of Arab nationalism. Syria has a unique experience in the Arab world of teaching medicine in Arabic since 1919 when the arabisation movement started in Damascus University. Later, after independence in 1946, the country has reinforced the “nationalist” “socialist” ideology through arabisation of school and university education so Arabic became the medium of instruction.

At one level, since 2006, ESP/EMP teaching in Tishreen University has seemed successful with the new curriculum change including the increased emphasis on teaching the specialised form of English and the introduction of one medical subject in the curriculum in all state-run Arabic-medium universities. The curriculum change took place and was part of the national reform process initiated in 2001. Qualified ESP teachers; mostly graduates from British universities, have been recruited to teach English and ESP across all university disciplines.

This ESP approach adopted in Tishreen University oversimplifies the “purposes of learning” and seems to have raised educational and linguistic problems which I identified earlier as a “discomfort zone”, a conflictive situation where ESP teachers feel “uneasy” about their teaching practice and status and students are demotivated and resistant to university English courses (as will be evidenced the data-based Chapter 4).
Having experienced ESP teaching at Tishreen University without formal training as a teacher was problematic for me at the time. The main reason for discussing my MA learning journey is that it has been a sort of post hoc training and which allowed me to examine the ESP situation at Tishreen from a “mainstream” ESP perspective but with unsatisfactory responses to my professional concerns. Hence, it seems that no progress will be made or improvement seen unless there is a better understanding of the complex ESP situation at Tishreen University that goes beyond “mainstream” applied linguistics-oriented ESP which is dominated by structural linguistics and managerialist approaches to syllabus design. It is “functional” and part of a “technicist” view of education and professional life which can be summarised as “find the problem and bring in a solution”.

1.5.1 Aims of the study

The thesis aspires to analyse the problems ESP has created in this particular situation—some of its symptoms are students’ resistance and ESP teachers’ bewilderment and dissatisfaction. This study demonstrates a complex situation which seems to have been created by the attempt to improve English language teaching through the demand for more ESP teaching alongside core subjects in the medium of English. The learning situation is “complex” because it involves many interacting key agents (students, ESP teachers, medical tutors, management officials, etc.) and others in the outer ring of the system in Figure 4 including the Syrian society, government, schools, English-medium universities, private language schools, English-speaking communities, and forces of globalisation and Arab nationalism I illustrate the complexity of the system in Figure 4.
University management

Teachers (Doctors/practitioners) of medicine

Teachers of English

Students of medicine

School

Private language schools

Globalisation & Arab nationalism

Other universities (private English-medium)

Syrian society

Government

English-speaking communities

Figure 4: The complex EMP situation at Tishreen University
By providing the space for teachers and students to voice their opinions, this study aims to provide a different more fluid (complex) understanding of ESP/EMP educational practice that is for the benefits of teachers, students and policy makers involved in the process of teaching ESP in the Arabic-medium universities. The current ESP approach cannot provide me with an answer to my professional concern as it is not designed to do this. Rather, its aim is to prescribe how we can carry out ESP efficiently. Therefore, I analyse the EMP situation at Tishreen University within a poststructural-complexity framework which critiques boundaries and determinism and acknowledges the presence of something that cannot be presented which is the desire for something in the future (i.e., a desire to become a doctor). Being aware of the challenge I invoke for myself when leaving the safety net of a rules-based approach to ESP research, I acknowledge losing confidence at times but I believe that ESP demands such a challenge in order to move beyond a rigid and mechanistic approach to ESP and thus, provide an alternative way of inquiring how ESP helps to prepare a person for the actual use of language in the professional life. On the surface of it, ESP is neutral and value-free and simply a useful way of helping specialists learn the English associated with their specialism and being able to access texts and to participate in a broader international medical discourse. By emphasising the “vocation” and “professional” of medicine (what students aspire to enter and what will judge them), I take a different approach in this study which is an endeavour to achieve my personal, professional and academic aims. Therefore, to address the concerns I raised earlier, the study aims to understand the complicated situation from the experience of various actors in the Faculty of Medicine.

The major strands of this enquiry are:

1. Establishing the bases of the “conflict” in this ESP situation in Tishreen University which is manifested in students’ resistance to English and the dissatisfaction and bewilderment of ESP teachers.
2. Providing an analysis of the socio-political factors in the creation of the current problem in ESP/EMP practice.
3. Examining the role of learning a foreign language plays in becoming a doctor (or any other profession) in an EFL context such as Syria.
4. Developing a view of ESP which goes beyond the boundaries of the “mainstream” applied linguistics-oriented ESP.
1.6 Significance of the study

This study provides the basis of a critique of the “reductionist” and “functional” mainstream ESP practice which privileges learner needs analysis while failing to meet the discursive realities of the professional world (Belcher, Johns & Paltridge, 2011). Through problematising “needs”, the study also contributes to the current identity research which is relatively rare in the ESP context (Paltridge, 2012). Learning English for medical purposes entails far more than simply learning “medical language”. Learning English as a foreign language is both an important part of the identity of the 21st Century Syrian doctor and therefore part of the unfinished process of learning to become a doctor.

The study contributes to ESP research in the Syrian context and the wider Arab region in its different theoretical and methodological perspective - qualitative informed with elements of poststructuralist and complexity theory. ESP research in Syria is limited and fragmented as clear in the small amount of academic research on the subject in the major academic depository at Al Assad Library in Damascus which archives Syrian-authored MA and PhD theses. Most ESP research in Syria conforms to “mainstream” ESP and the wider scientifically-oriented and technicist mainstream research in ELT in the Arab World, which both ignore the fact that researching humans cannot be reduced to measuring, experiments and rules of control. Previous research is important but replication of needs analysis-based research can scarcely help us progress especially if it fails to take into account the socio-political and socio-cultural implications of the spread of English and adoption of ESP at tertiary level.

By going beyond needs analysis, the study provides a critical analysis of the current ESP situation in one of Syria’s several universities, in order to raise awareness to the changing role of “global English” in Syria and of the need for rethinking ESP to engage learners and teachers in the process of educational policy decision-making and implementation. A critical approach to research on language education in the Arab World is scarce. Key examples of work that fits in the critical spring in the Arab world are: a) Habbash, (2011) (Saudi Arabia) who uses a postmodernist conceptualisation of critical theory in the analysis of the phenomenon of global English and its implications on educational policies and practices, b) Troudi & Jendli (2011) (United Arab Emirates) who argue that “without a critical approach to issues of education, the nomothetic and at times erroneous nature of the claim to scientific objectivity by educational policies such
as EMI\textsuperscript{1} will continue to exert a lot of power and influence on the lives of generations of students” (Troudi & Jendli 2011: 42 quoted in Habbash, 2011:245), c) and more recently, Al-Issa and Dahan’s (2011) edition on the impact of global English on the Arabic language, Arab culture, and identity. Hence, this study is conducted in this spirit and aims to develop a critical understanding of ESP and language learning and teaching in the Syrian context contributing to the growing, not yet fully developed critical work in the Arab World.

1.7 Mapping the thesis

The thesis is organised into six chapters. In Chapter One, I have introduced the thesis to the reader through a reflection on my early ESP teaching experience and my MA learning experience alongside a review of mainstream ESP and aspects of critical approaches to TESOL, mainly the critique of needs analysis and the politics of English. This was followed by a statement of the rationale for the study and the professional concerns and aims of the study. Finally, the significance of the study and an outline of the thesis structure were provided.

In Chapter Two, I draw on aspects of poststructuralism and complexity as my theoretical/methodological framework and discuss some aspects of poststructuralism and complexity theory alongside a statement of their onto-epistemology. This is followed by an account of the research design including discussion of the methodology, research questions, research setting, participants and methods of data collection. The research process is presented next including the pilot study and data analysis procedures. My reflexivity and trustworthiness in research are then discussed to finally state the research and ethical considerations.

In Chapter Three, I analyse issues in English language teaching in Syrian Higher Education as a background to the study, I identify the role of English in the Syrian educational system by examining the historical, ideological, economic, educational, and

\textsuperscript{1} EMI= English as a medium of instruction
linguistic aspects of the Syrian local context. An examination of recent Syrian government language policies which influence the teaching of English and English for Specific Purposes in higher education is presented as data generated from document analysis.

In **Chapter Four**, I present the findings of the study examining the complex foreign language issues from the perspectives of ESP teachers, medical students, and medical faculty members. I also examine key professional themes in learning ESP/EMP in Tishreen University.

In **Chapter Five**, I examine the emergent themes of the research and discuss them in relation to the broader field of ESP. The chapter presents an understanding of EMP which stands as response to the issues of concern I raised in very beginning of the thesis.

Finally, in **Chapter Six**, I draw an ESP/Applied linguistics relationship, based on the research findings, as a possible “way forward” to understand what I found key shared notions of concern. Implications for pedagogy and new directions in ESP research are provided next. The thesis comes to a close with a summary of the limitations of the study as well as few concluding thoughts.

**Summary**

The chapter introduced the thesis through a reflection on my ESP teaching experience and learning journey to identify the “problems” in the ESP situation at Tishreen University. Throughout the chapter, “mainstream” ESP was reviewed for the purpose of understanding the “problems” which came out of my teaching experience and which were not successfully understood in MA studies. Aspects of the critical approaches were next discussed; mainly the critique of the “functional” “technicist” mainstream, critique of needs analysis and the notion of identity. That provided useful alternative tools to examine the ESP situation in my university. Having insights from the critical approach, I presented the rationale for the present study alongside the professional concerns, aims of my study and its significance. Finally, an outline of the thesis content was provided.
2. Introduction

In the previous chapter, I established that English for Specific Purposes (ESP) in Applied Linguistics has embraced a “mechanistic” tradition of practice-driven research that addresses “effective pedagogy” and “practical outcomes”. The present study which aims to understand a complicated ESP situation is not aimed at this “end-goal”. Rather, it is an attempt to engage in questioning the rigid boundaries of the complex ESP field to reach a more fluid understanding of the current status of ESP in Tishreen University. Human actions, interactions, and negotiations with the world are fluid, non-fixed, dynamic and continually changing. Therefore, we cannot understand a system such as English for Specific Purposes in a “mechanistic” “cause and effect” logic which denies human agency and creativity. I begin the chapter with discussion of the theoretical/methodological grounds of the current study including aspects of poststructuralism, complexity theory and their onto-epistemological underpinnings. Following this, I discuss the research design and methodology, data-gathering methods, and the research process. Next, data analysis procedures and an account of the research process are presented, followed by an examination of my reflexive voice and trustworthiness in the research. The chapter ends with a statement of the research ethical considerations.
2.1 Theoretical/methodological perspective

Figure 5: Mess in social sciences research, adapted from John Law (2004:1)

*If this is an awful mess... then would something less messy make a mess of describing it?* (Law, 2004:1)

Researching natural complex systems such as life, education, language, human events and behaviours in social sciences is unique whether “being entirely unique or having some properties that are relevant and potentially applicable to other situations” (Yin, 2011:14). The ESP situation under study is, as established in Chapter 1, complicated and could be seen as a system where a multiple network of elements (students, teachers, society, Arab-nationalism, English-speaking communities, etc.) in dynamic interaction within loose boundaries (see Figure 4).

The “mainstream” ESP, as previously reviewed in Chapter 1, has been dominant with attempts to understand this complex system in a “mechanistic” “functional” way that addresses little parts of this system—mainly determining specific needs of a specific learner group to “effectively” design courses. In the particular Syrian context, all previous work attempted at looking at specific parts of the ESP system in a reductionist way which seems to have not added up to any improved practice of ESP in Tishreen. The conflictive situation and the issues of concern I raised in the Chapter 1, I believe, cannot be understood from one particular part (i.e. students). Therefore, I take a non-reductionist approach to ESP basing my work in a poststructural-complexity framework because we live in a postmodern complex world and the perspective that
offers a “mechanistic” “functional” understanding, by drawing things apart and placing rigid boundaries to the system by overdetermining rules, is now problematic and of limited value and will not help us understanding a conflictive complex situation such as the ESP situation at Tishreen University. In ESP history, the ESP genre approaches which have been influential in the history of ESP as described earlier in the introduction of this thesis, have been working to provide students with a knowledge of relevant genres so they can act effectively in their target contexts. Most of these genres were linguistics-oriented especially the ESP approach (Swales, 1990) with interest in discourse community so the text used to reflect conventions of this community, and accordingly genre is viewed as structure of communicative acts of members of the discourse community (Hyland, 2003: 45–47). One of the schools of genre theory, the New Rhetoric approach, was influenced by a poststructural view of language and paid close attention to the rhetorical situations in which particular genres are used, and the types of texts; how rhetorical contexts can govern the grammatical choice (Hyland: 2003:20). The second approach is based on Halliday’s (1994) Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) (the “Sydney School” in the US) which studies language variations in different contexts and the “underlying patterns which organise texts so they are culturally and socially recognised as performing particular functions” (Hyland, 2003:22). This functionalist approach which is dominant in ESP views the language system as rigid with clearly defined linguistics boundaries that ignores the importance of what is *not yet present* in front of us as linguists or course designers etc. Having recognised that “mainstream” ESP at Tishreen University has not helped improving ESP practice from the time I had taught there up to the time of conducting this research, I position my theoretical perspective on some assumptions from poststructuralism (critique of presence) and its understanding from complexity theory (critique of boundaries) and their shared onto-epistemology for a better understanding of this system which aims at improving ESP practice.

### 2.1.1 Poststructuralism

To begin with the theoretical influence of the interplay between poststructuralism and complexity, I take Mark Poster’s (1988) account of “poststructuralism”. Poststructuralism, “a collective term or a set of theoretical positions, is very difficult to define in any homogeneous manner” (cited in Marshall, 2004: xv). Poststructuralism, as Fortun (2006) notes, “challenges us to think outside dominant systems of thought” and a
poststructuralist research is recognised as “an effort to describe the world, while questioning the way we construct our descriptions” (301-302). I am primarily interested in how poststructuralism started to challenge the idea of structural linguistics and the idea that language and meaning are positioned in a “fixed linguistic structure”. In structuralism, which poststructuralism both incorporates and moves beyond, de Saussure (a structural linguist) describes language in his theory of semiotics as a system of signs with each sign made up of a signifier (a phonic sound or written graphic image) and a signified (concept meaning) with nothing inside the mind or outside language that contributes to how the sign operates (Weedon, 1987: 23). Hence, the meanings humans attach to signs are produced within the self-regulating language system “in which all the elements fit together, and in which the value of anyone element depends on the simultaneous coexistence of all the others” (de Saussure, 1983:113). Everything already exists in the present.

Moving beyond a structuralism understanding of language, poststructuralism “or post-Saussaurianism”, a highly contested term, questions the idea that language mirrors the world and critiques the universal notions of objectivity, progress, and reason. In particular, I am interested in this thesis in how de Saussure’s idea of “fixed structure” is unsettled by Derrida’s critique of presence. Despite that the meaning of any element being dependant on other elements, de Saussure’s system of language implies that all meaning can be located within the boundaries of the linguistic system which is present. So meaning moves within the structure but the whole structure is already in the world in the present.

Derrida (1974/1976), in the grammatological analysis labelled *deconstruction*, moves the discussion of de Saussure’s structured fixed language system to reveal dynamism in the language system which renders meaning conditioned upon factors beyond the specific properties of “words-in-relation- to-others within-the-system that is present. Rather, meanings extend beyond the linguistic boundaries. Derrida’s deconstruction, for instance, aims to “dismantle [déconstruire] the metaphysical and rhetorical structures which are at work, not in order to reject or discard them, but to reinscribe them in another way”’ (Derrida, quoted in Spivak,1974, p. lxxv ). In the “play of differences”, thus deconstruction critiques structures determined by *identity* and *presence*; in other words, it challenges the relationship between presence and the meaning we ascribe to it to incorporate the “not-yet present” (in the future). He holds that there is a temporal element at work in our meaning making. To Derrida, meaning is derived not only from
identity between sign and the thing and not only from *presence* but also from the *absence* of the other which always brings forth something original and new (St. Pierre, 2000:482). What Derrida started to say is that the meaning is not only inside the structure but also outside of it, not only in what is *present*, but in what is *not-yet present*.

Because of the concerns which I raised in Chapter 1 about the failure of the mainstream ESP to improve ESP in Syria, I look at ESP from a poststructural perspective which takes the future (i.e. aspiration towards what is not yet present) into account in understanding the ESP situation in Tishreen University. Nonetheless, because the issue of boundaries also seems important in the study, boundaries between elements moving and interacting in the ESP system, I explore the complexity understanding of poststructuralism because it enables a particular reading of the “critique of presence” that will enable me to do certain things in my study that I could not do with poststructuralism alone. This critique of presence aligns with some insights from complexity theory, in particular, the one developed by Osberg, Biesta, and Cilliers (2008) which I will explore next.

### 2.1.2 Complexity theory

In this section, I will explain certain aspects of poststructuralism through complexity because viewing poststructuralism through complexity allows me to critique the mechanistic approach to ESP. Although poststructuralist, deconstructionist and pragmatist “adopt similar views of causality and process, but they do not explicitly deal with the mechanics of determinism and so the problem with determinism remains obscure” (Osberg, 2008:145). In order to explain Derrida’s discussion of critique of presence in relation to the ESP situation at Tishreen University, I view it through complexity theory because complexity theory makes more explicitly the mechanistic reductionist view and thus, through a complexity-based understanding of the critique of presence, I will look at ESP as a system without clearly defined boundaries.

Derrida’s critique of presence (of de Saussure’s “fixed linguistic structure”) can, in complexity terms, be seen as a critique of spatial and temporal boundaries, and this critique of boundaries challenges the “mechanistic” understandings of process. This poststructural-complexity framework, which I find helpful in understanding the complex ESP situation, has been worked out in detail by Osberg *et al.*, (2008). Natural
complex systems such as language and education “do not have clearly defined boundaries” (p.218). In the same way language is viewed from a poststructural perspective, I view the ESP situation I research as similarly complex. In order to understand this system, I use Cilliers’ (1998) poststructural argument, particularly Derrida’s work, on the inadequacy of a rule-based approach in modelling complex systems. The view that knowledge of ESP/EMP is reduced to simple rules and patterns that students learn in order to be ready to perform well in real life, sounds too reductionist. Therefore, I borrow the argument put forth by complexity theory about the non-linearity and nonreductionist perspectives to investigate, understand and conceptualise the field of EMP.

Complexity is a characteristic of our complex society. With the technological advances, more interaction and communication take place in an interconnected network. Human beings exist on earth alongside other biological and physical surroundings having a distinctive unique feature of having “consciousness” that distinguishes them from other life forms and other natural physical phenomena. The uniqueness of individual human experience combined with multitudinous possibilities of collective human interaction and the evolutionary nature of human society produces a very high degree of complex interpretive outcomes (norms, values, historical interpretation) (Geyer, 2003:14). With this level of complexity, it seems impossible to understand the structure of such a phenomenon in a linear way. Geyer exemplifies what adds a layer of complexity to the human condition as

human beings create signs, symbols, myths, narratives and discourse in order to understand, control and exchange information about their surroundings. Examples of this conscious complexity include the creation of language, norms and values, and discourse and can be taken from virtually any type of human verbal interaction. (Geyer, 2003:18)

Studying human events in the complex structure of our world presumably requires no one rigid definite way of approaching it as events and processes in the world are, in Law’s (2004) view, “complex because they necessarily exceed our capacity to know them. No doubt local structures can be identified, but,[...] the world in general defies any attempt at overall orderly accounting” (p.6). To make these abstract ideas more concrete, I refer back to Figure 4 to a “structure” of key agents and elements acting together in various ways in the ESP/EMP situation, which a linear understanding of it is hard to get at because of the dynamism and interconnectedness of the elements inside the inner and the outer ring in Figure 4. By structure, I do not claim that there is a fixed
structure; for this reason I draw a dotted circle to indicate temporal boundaries which may or may not exist or at least I can look at these loose boundaries between all of these parts which are inevitably woven and influencing in one way or another. As Osberg (2008) suggests, the name “system” is “misleading as it implies the existence of a discrete entity when in fact none exists. Complex “systems” have no distinct boundaries, they exist only because of the fluxes that feed them and disappear in the absence of such fluxes” (Osberg, 2008: 145). If the open system has all these agents interacting in a dynamic way at different levels, the questions which remain are those of Osberg et al (2008):

How we can describe or represent or theorise a system like this in terms of a single or unified set of rules… how we can represent the behaviour of the system in terms of a set of rules when its output is partially determined by sets of rules to which we have no access.(p.219)

In the context of EMP in Tishreen University, the initial investigation of the situation reveals a set of components (see Figure 4) which, I believe, “can only be understood if we acknowledge the ‘presence’ of something that cannot be presented, that can never become ‘present’ ” (Osberg, 2008: 225). Learning English for medical purposes is complicated and cannot be only understood in a mechanistic way with logical rules that determine outcomes. Hence, English in this system is not simply reduced to learning rules of “medical language”. Rather, it is learning English as a desire for something in the future which is a dynamic process of learning which must have no boundaries. Osberg argues that having this boundary problem means that

in practice we are unable to formulate “laws” which fully explain the movement of the system, or complex process, from one state to another…that we should not try to understand complex processes as if they are objects, each with their own discrete origin, end point and trajectory, from which we can calculate the logical rules or laws that drive them. (2008: 146)

The issue of boundaries, in Derrida’s critique of presence, is a critique of temporal boundaries because Derrida argues that what we describe as “present” is always caught up with what is “not yet present”. The “emergenist understanding of causality” (Osberg, 2007), has some compatibility with deconstruction and uses the notion of emergence from complexity theory which can best be drawn on to critique determinism and the
“cause and effect” relationship. Hence, the logic of emergence in education, the emergentist critique of determinism makes it possible to imagine a form of schooling which is no longer concerned with questions about how best to teach the child about a pre-existing world (which, largely, are questions about whether this would or should be presented or represented in schools. (Osberg & Biesta 2007:31)

At this point, it is worth distinguishing between “complicated” and “complex” systems as made by Cilliers (2000) who views complex systems as having “emergent properties” which cannot be predicted “merely by analysing the components of the system” while the behaviour of complicated things is “is predictable-as it mostly should be” (p.41). In contrast with the logic of linear cause and effect which yield predictable outcomes, I try to understand this educational phenomenon (EMP) through the “a logic of emergence” (Osberg et al, 2008). Osberg et al developed a complex and open ended (centrifugal) understanding of the educational process which is “emergent”, “not about closures but about openings… an unending process…” Hence, as they argue, it becomes difficult to determine whether someone is “educated” any longer because education is no longer “acquired”.

This means we can no longer say that education begins with the student, or with the teacher (or even with the curriculum). We have to understand all these “elements” of the educational process as always already in dynamic interaction with each other and with elements “outside” the system. Without a concrete start (or end) point we can now only describe the educational process as taking place in space of emergence. (2008:156-157)

Learning English for medical purposes at Tishreen University, as described in Chapter 1, is problematic and complicated. To account for its complexity, I cannot simply study one of its elements (i.e. needs analysis) without considering what may emerge during the process of learning the foreign language. If the matter is simply solved by doing linguistic needs analysis, we should not have any symptoms of “conflict” in such an EMP educational situation at Tishreen University. To view EMP as a dynamic complex system, attention must be drawn to the emergent properties of this learning system which, therefore, lead us to think of what is there that we do not know at present and which may be an important part of the drive for the Syrian doctor to learn English.
2.1.3 Onto-epistemology

In this section, I will discuss the onto-epistemological issues, the multiple logical ways that influence how I realise and explain reality (Pring, 2004). Freire (1972a) presents humans “as beings in the process of becoming – as unfinished, uncompleted beings in and with a likewise unfinished reality” (p.72). Human beings live not ‘in’ the world but ‘with’ the world (Freire, 1972b: 51) (see also Kincheloe & McLaren, 1994:139-140). In my research, I wanted to engage students in the process of understanding the reality in which they live and evolve and which gets its meaning via them. Law (2004) argues that “that there is a world out there and that knowledge and our other activities need to respond to its ‘out-thereness’ (p.7). Knowing is not about a world ‘out there’ waiting to be discovered, but concerns the relationship between actions and their consequences-which is a central idea of Dewey’s transactional theory of knowing (Dewey & Bentley, 1949, cited in Biesta, 2007:10). Combining insights from the work of Derrida’s deconstruction and the “complexity based” understanding of knowledge, Osberg *et al* (2008) developed an emergentist epistemology in which

‘the world’ and our ‘knowledge’ of it are part of *the same complex system* (rather than being two separate complex systems, which we somehow need to get into alignment)… *in* which knowledge reaches us not as something we receive but as a response, which brings forth new worlds because it necessarily adds something (which was not present anywhere before it appeared) to what came before. *(2008:223-225)*

This emergenist epistemology developed by Osberg & Biesta (2007), the idea of “becoming” as an onto-epistemology is shared among the concepts I introduced from poststructuralism (Derrida’s critique of presence) and complexity (the critique of boundaries) as opposed to the idea of “being” in deterministic/mechanistic terms.

Having discussed the theoretical/methodological poststructural complexity- framework, my aim is, therefore, to develop an emergentist perspective using this critique of mechanistic and reductionist understandings of process (equivalent to Derrida’s critique of presence) to understand the issues of concern that I identified at Tishreen University. Rather than using the more usual “mechanistic” perspective, a “complexity-poststructural” approach to understand the ESP- related issues at Tishreen University can better account for the complexity of ESP teaching in Tishreen University through this “non-deterministic” view of learning of English for Medical Purposes that critiques boundaries which limit and predetermine the “purpose” for learning English.
Therefore, an attempt is made to view EMP/ESP as a form of education that is emergent and open to possibilities and unpredictable outcomes based on what key agents in interaction are “present” in a particular time and space and what agents are “not yet present”. The onto-epistemology of “becoming” and the emergent relationship between the world and our understanding of it could open up a possibility towards understanding EMP as a key element in the process of becoming a doctor. This leads me now to present my research design.

2.2 The research design

2.2.1 Methodology

I share Pennycook’s view that “universities are not neutral” and that they represent the stage onto which “local knowledges meet global knowledges in a battle to represent different worlds in different ways” (Pennycook, 1997: 262). In other words, in a given language learning context, language needs not to be studied in isolation but rather in relation to social and other political dimensions. It could be argued that the assumption of a single reality and local knowledge is over-simplified as reality and knowledge may be multiple. As of the representation of reality, in line with key insights from complexity theory and poststructuralism discussed earlier, I move to today’s picture of methods which is shifting the attention from the ones that “discover and depict realities” to the ones that “anticipate in the enactment of those realities” (Law, 2004:45). Law’s argument is borrowed from a poststructuralist thought which implies that “presence is impossible without absence” (ibid: 144). Similarly, Osberg (2005)’s post-structural post-methodological approach “does not seek to improve on already existing understandings (structure) but seeks, rather, to unsettle pre-existing understandings (structure), and thereby open new ways of thinking and being” (p.31). Law (2004) understands the world as “complex and generative” which entails that “we and our methods help to generate it” (p. 8). In this perspective, this poststructuralist complexity-informed research cannot be reducible to a specific methodology and the use of method, as Law argues,

will often be slow and uncertain. A risky and troubling process, it will take time and effort to make realities and hold them steady for a moment against a background of flux and indeterminacy. Law (2004:10)
Methodology is defined as “the strategy, plan of action, process, or designing behind the choice and use of particular methods” (Crotty, 1998: 3) and as the particular ways research questions are examined (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000: 18). However, the issue is not that simple as researchers are confronted with a plethora of methodologies and methods which are not usually laid in a highly organised fashion and may appear more as a maze than as pathways to orderly research. There is so much talk of their philosophical underpinnings, but how the methodologies and methods relate to more theoretical elements is often left unclear. To add to the confusion, the terminology is far from consistent in research literature and social science texts. One frequently finds the same term in a number of different, sometimes even contradictory[,] ways. (ibid)

For the purpose of this study, qualitative research is adopted which is “interactive” (Maxwell, 1996: 1–8) and “has no array of fixed designs… no clear typology of blueprints” (Yin, 2011:76). This gives qualitative research design “a retrospective feature of the study” which is “an iterative process” (ibid: 77). Such a qualitative inquiry requires a close engagement of the researcher with the context researched in the process of developing the research questions (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2006:2).

Informed by poststructuralist-complexity thoughts which critique determinism, I aim to analyse the situation of EMP learning and teaching in Tishreen University in order to understand and question it. Hence, I agree with Cohen, Manion, & Morrison (2000) who argue “that the positivist and interpretive paradigms are essentially technicist, seeking to understand and render more efficient an existing situation, rather than to question to transform it.” (p. 28-29).

Having reviewed accessible research studies in the field of ESP in the Syrian context which fits in the “mainstream” ESP and being familiar with the Medical Faculty at Tishreen University, I went to the field to collect data with some basic knowledge of the context but I tried some aspects of the exploratory research in the beginning to “gain new insights, discover new ideas and/or increase knowledge of a phenomenon” (Burns & Grove, 2003: 313) to familiarise myself with the hospital culture and the dynamics of interaction among student and senior doctors. I prepared arrangements of multiple levels of data collection to enrich my qualitative knowledge which is, as Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2006) note, “produced from a variety of rich perspectives on social reality” (p. 16).
2.2.2 From concepts to research questions

As this qualitative research is “iterative” and “takes an exploratory path rather than one driven by specific questions”, I did not formulate the research questions before gathering the data. Instead, I was “more concerned with a general issue, conceptual problem, area of interests, and so on” (Gibson & Brown 2009: 51). So the general concepts formulated prior to the research were:

1- Experiences of medical students’ English language learning (past/present/future)
2- ESP/EMP teaching in Tishreen University from teachers’ perspective.
3- ESP/EMP from language policy makers’ perspective.

During data collection and analysis, research questions started to get crystallised as the study proceeded and the final research questions are:

1- How is English language teaching and learning positioned within a university curriculum informed by Arab nationalist language policy in the globalised context? (Language policy, ESP goals, pedagogy and/or curriculum)
2- What are students’ experiences of learning the English language (English for Medical Purposes/EMP) within the university curriculum?
3- What are the issues involved in learning ESP/EMP, from a professional point of view, in Tishreen University?

2.2.3 The research setting: English and ESP teachers in the Faculty of Medicine

This research was carried out in the Faculty of Medicine at Tishreen University which is the third largest of the 5 state Arabic-medium Syrian universities. It is located in the Mediterranean coastal city of Latakia in Syria and was established in 1971. The Faculty of Medicine was opened in 1974-1975 and it confers two academic degrees; M.D. in Medicine (six years) and M.Sc. in the areas of specialisation (3-4 years).
Table 1: The medicine curriculum in Tishreen University towards the award of Licence/Bachelor of Docteur en Médecine

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study year</th>
<th>Subjects in the curriculum over two-term per academic year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Mode of teaching:</strong> Lectures (2 two-hour sessions per week per term)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Medium of instruction:</strong> Arabic as in all state-run Syrian universities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 1</td>
<td>7 biomedical subjects, Arabic language, nationalist socialist education, English Term 1 and English Term 2 (General English)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 2</td>
<td>8 medical subjects and 2 specialised English subjects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 3</td>
<td>13 medical subjects and 2 English subjects (content subjects taught in English)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 4</td>
<td>12 medical subjects and 1 English subject (content subjects taught in English)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 5</td>
<td>12 medical subjects and 1 English subject (content subjects taught in English)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 6</td>
<td>Elective year (no English courses are offered)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:** Generally, all medical students in the state universities practise in the correspondent city training university hospital. In Tishreen, it is Al Assad University Hospital.

The medicine curriculum is mapped out to present how English /ESP is positioned in the University curriculum. The teaching staff in Syrian Universities is local unlike in other Arab countries (Daoud, 1996 and Al-Halwachi, 1990). Subject lecturers in higher education must hold an MA or a PhD (Ministry of Higher Education, 2004: 1). However, English language teachers do not fall under this category as there exists a significant number of current English language teachers at the university who are not MA holders. The rationale is not stated in accessible published policy documents but could pertain to the lack of graduates with higher studies qualification to cater for ESP teaching across all faculties/departments in the university. English language teachers across all university disciplines from Arts to Physics are recruited by the Higher Institute of Languages (HIL) and are either permanent staff members in the institute, graduates with B.As in English Literature with a “good” overall average (60%) and/or five year English language teaching experience (Daoud, 1999:4), MA holders, or English Department teaching assistants awaiting their university scholarships to pursue
their higher studies abroad. In some cases, few subject specialists, mainly graduates of English-speaking universities, teach English when necessary. The HIL takes diverse responsibilities but is quintessentially involved in developing the learning and teaching of living languages in Syria, supporting scientific research, bridging the cultural and educational gap (cross cultural exchanges) between Syria and the rest of the world, providing technical support in the field of translation and interpretation for various national, regional and international functions and conferences which take place at Tishreen University. The majority of its full-time teaching staff members are graduates of acknowledged British (French in the case of French teachers) universities with specialised qualifications in English Language Teaching (ELT) and English for Specific Purposes (ESP). The institute also allows for visiting lecturers from French, British, and German universities for wider global intellectual and cultural communication. The HIL makes decisions on the choice of ELT/ESP textbooks across all university faculties through set a ‘Book Purchase Committee’ (Tishreen University, 2011).

As of 2006, the Ministry of Higher Education has increased demand for ESP teaching so it is being taught in year 2 of all undergraduate studies in the university as illustrated in the Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE) decree No.229 /2006 and MoHE decree No. 257/ 2007 (see 3.3.4). In theory, it is proposed that the specialised English language in the ‘advanced’ years of the programme (years 3, 4, and 5) is taught by subject specialists with good English language proficiency in the Faculty of Medicine. Nonetheless, in practice, the majority of the lecturers in the Medical Faculty are graduates of Eastern European universities whose level of English does not entitle them to lecture in the medium of English. Currently, ESP teachers from the Higher Institute of Languages teach English across all years except for year 3 where a core medical subject is taught in English by the subject specialist.
## 2.2.4 Research participants

### Table 2: Research participants

| Teachers (T) | 6 experienced Syrian Arab ESP teachers at the Higher Institute of Languages (Tishreen University) with teaching experience in the Faculty of Medicine. They were individually interviewed to probe their attitudes and beliefs on teaching English for Medical Purposes in the Medical School. 
(Mira, Razan, Nancy, Liza, Mudar, Zia) |
|-------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Students (UMS) (PMS) | 24 undergraduate medical students (UMS) met in 4 focus groups over three consecutive times. (further details are provided in Table 3) 
6 postgraduate medical students (PMS) were individually interviewed in their workplace (i.e. a state hospital) due to the clash in diverse work shifts and time constraints. |
| University management (UM) | The Dean (UM1) and Vice-Dean of the Faculty of Medicine (UM2) and the Head of the English Centre in the Higher Institute of Languages (UM3). |
| Medical practitioners (MP) | **Abeer:** a specialist doctor, practices medicine in private clinic and in Al Assad university hospital, and lectures in public Arabic-medium and private English-medium universities. 
**Abdulla:** a specialist doctor, a graduate of a British university, practices medicine in a private clinic and in Al Assad University Hospital, lectures in the Arabic-medium Tishreen University and teaches one content subject in English in year 3. 
**George:** a consultant in the UK, practices medicine in Syria and lectures in Arabic-medium universities. |
2.2.5 Methods of data generation

Stage 1
- Policy documents analysis
- 3 Semi-structured interviews with university management (UMI) in the Faculty of Medicine and the Higher Institute of Languages

Stage 2
- Focus group 1 (FG1): Group (G) A, B, C, D
  - Teacher interviews (TI): 1, 2
  - Classroom observations (CO): 1, 2
  - Hospital observation 1 (HO) & Postgraduate student interviews (PSI): 1, 2
  - Medical practitioner interview (MPI): 1

Stage 3
- Focus group 2 (FG2): Group (G) A, B, C, D
  - Teacher interviews (TI): 3, 4
  - Classroom observations (CO): 3, 4
  - Hospital observation 3 (HO) & Postgraduate student interviews (PSI): 3, 4
  - Medical practitioner interview (MPI): 2

Stage 4
- Focus group 3 (FG3): Group (G) A, B, C, D
  - Teacher interviews (TI): 5, 6
  - Classroom observations (CO): 5, 6
  - Hospital observation 3 (HO) & Postgraduate student interviews (PSI): 5, 6
  - Medical practitioner interview (MPI): 3

Figure 6: Data collection stages
2.2.3.1 Document analysis

As a preliminary step into data collection, I accessed documents from the archive of the Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE) resolutions in the Higher Institute of Languages in Tishreen University. Analysis gained from this method gave insights into issues to be addressed in the semi-structured interviews with teachers about the practice of ESP and in the student focus groups discussions. Using documents in research “can reduce the problems and challenges of reflexivity” since they “were created for some reason other than your inquiry and cannot be said to have been influenced by your inquiry” (Yin, 2011:149-150). Documents were selected on a purposive sampling basis and they include key government language policy documents from a government institution (Tishreen University) and from official government websites mainly the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Higher Education, and Tishreen University and the Arab Academy and the Syrian National News Agency (SANA). All documents were accessible either as published freely online or were provided to me upon request for research purposes (Wellington, 2000). The official documents exist only in Arabic so all data used from this source are my English translation of the original ones. The analysis of language policy documents provided invaluable data on content and origin of ESP and other related-documents on the use of Arabic as medium of instruction in the public sector. It is recommended that documents should be reviewed prior to interviews to ensure the researcher will not have “to interrupt an otherwise healthy flow of conversation” in order to verify certain common sense information already available in the written documents (ibid: 149). The analysis of the documents also fed back into the research background and was linked to the literature on the impact of globalisation and the global spread of English on the language policy in Syrian Higher Education.

2.2.3.2 Focus groups

As the study is positioned in a poststructuralist framework, I cannot reduce it or restrict it to specific structured methods that do not fit in that framework. Focus groups were deployed as “a preliminary, exploratory technique” (Morgan, 1997:58) to “bring new political possibilities”, “shift the balance of power in favour of the participants”, and it has the “potential of transforming the researcher-researched relationship” (Barbour & Kitzinger, 1999:18). Barbour & Kitzinger (1999:7) suggest a ‘flexible approach’ to
sampling taking in consideration the type of research questions, number of people, time and resource limitations. This is what Kuzel (1992) names a ‘qualitative sampling’ ‘in order to encompass diversity and compose a structured rather than random sample, guided by the particular research questions which they are addressing’ (in Barbour & Kitzinger, 1999:7). The focus groups in this study function like group interviews with one distinct feature of “the reliance is on interaction within the group, based on topics that are supplied by the researcher who typically takes the role of a moderator” (Morgan, 1997:2).

Focus groups are “frequently conducted with purposively selected samples in which the participants are recruited from a limited number of sources (often only one)” (Morgan, 1997:35). Hence, I used a theoretically-motivated or purposive sampling which comprised 4 small focus group sets of 6 participants in each; that “work(s) best when the participants are likely to be both interested in the topic and respectful of each other” (Morgan 1997:42). This small number was also selected to ensure a “high level of participant involvement” in the topic of the research under discussion (ibid: 67). The groups were homogeneous composed in terms of age and year of study which falls into the core of the nature of the study that aims to explore student’s attitudes and beliefs on English and EMP are explored across all years of undergraduate study. I, purposefully, selected each group’s participants who were acquaintances not only colleagues so that they “can comfortably discuss the topic in ways that are useful to the researcher” (ibid: 38). Medical students met in four groups (FG) over three consecutive times for each during the second semester of the academic year 2009/2010 (12 focus groups in total). All meetings were conducted in Arabic and digitally recorded. FG 1 covered past experiences of learning English, FG 2 centred the discussions on students’ present experience of learning English/EMP and the role of English in their personal, academic, and professional lives, and the last FG3 meetings were an invitation for students to conceptualise a future EMP course which, they believe, should be taught to medicinal students at Tishreen University.
Focus groups are “particularly suited to the study of attitudes and experiences around specific topics,… better for exploring how points of view are constructed and expressed … particularly useful for allowing participants to generate their own questions, frames and concepts and to pursue their own priorities on their own terms, in their own vocabulary” (Barbour & Kitzinger, 1999:5). That was the indirect determiner of the focus groups discussion content. The value of the method of focus groups is that it allows for understanding not what but why people feel and think the way they do. The interaction in a naturalised context allowed participants to probe each other’s views and modify their own respectively (Bryman 2004; Kitsinger, 1994). In this study, focus groups were utilised to “democratize the research process by functioning as a forum for public participation.” (Barbour & Kitzinger, 1999: 21). Charmaz (2004:504) points out that “the interaction between the researcher and the researched produces the data, therefore, the meanings that the researcher observes and defines” (p.504). All group individuals were equally given the opportunity to voice agreement or disagreement with other views. They negotiated and constructed meaning with me (the researcher) in their own space to share their attitudes towards and experiences of taking EMP/ESP classes during their undergraduate studies. This also allowed me to collect students’ “different
perspectives as they operate within a social network” (ibid: 5). Morgan (1996) indicates that “it is the researcher's interest that provides the focus, whereas the data themselves come from the group interaction” (in Morgan, 1997:6). However, despite the positive consequences of focus groups, psychological effects could emerge in groups where some members tend to dominate others and some views may be met negatively from other group members (Barbour & Kitzinger, 1999: 21). One limitation of the focus group is the difficulty of data analysis which develops themes and captures the interaction among participants. Kitzinger (1994) and Morgan & Spanish (1984) were two sources which helped me creating the thematic analysis structure from the interaction in the focus group discussions.

2.2.3.3 Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews were utilised for “probing of views and opinions where it is desirable for respondents to expand on their answers” and can thus be best utilised in subjective situations where we can elicit meanings “that respondents ascribe to concepts or events” (Gray, 2004:217) (see also Esterberg, 2002; Kristin, 2002). Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 3 senior university officials in the Higher Institute of Languages and the Faculty of Medicine in Tishreen University, 6 ESP teachers in Tishreen University who hold postgraduate degrees in ELT/ESP/Linguistic, 6 postgraduate medical students practising in Al Assad Hospital in Latakia and 3 medical doctors in their private clinics. Interviews were based upon ‘interview guide’ which is “the brief list of memory prompts of areas to be covered’ and which are informed by the document analysis and issues emerged from students’ focus groups discussion.” (Bryman, 2004: 324). Participants were interviewed in a 30-minute session each and all were digitally recorded. Although I attempted at minimising my influence in the interview, I have to acknowledge my potential bias as any “interview relies on interaction and making meaning between all participants and contamination is everywhere” (Gubrium & Holstein, 2003:79).

A related point to the shared process of meaning making between the interviewer and interviews is the notion of co-construction of meaning and data generation especially in acquaintance interviewing where prior relationships with some of my participants are involved (with ESP teachers who were colleague in the Higher Institute of Languages). Garton and Coupland (2010), Rapley (2001,2004) and Roulston et al.
(2001) are among the very few who examine the effect that the interviewer and interviewee’s prior experiences or relationships might have on this joint construction. Garton and Coupland (2010) note that what marks these interviews out as different is the joint and on-going construction of shared knowledge and experiences, rather than each participant recounting their individual narratives” (p. 547) and therefore acquaintance interviews “do allow researchers access to resources that are not always available in more traditional social sciences interviews” (p.548) (see Appendix D for a sample of questions and answers in a teacher interview). What Garton & Copland (2010) suggest is that “reflexivity” which is integral to this kind of qualitative research, “can be extended to the analysis of the construction of the interview itself and to a consideration of how the data is generated as a result of previous relationships” (p.548). This will be discussed further in 2.4 with a special reference to my “insider” role in the research.

2.2.3.4 Classroom and hospital observation

Marvasti (2004:51) reiterates Adler and Adler’s (1987) argument in their Membership Roles in the Field in which the choice of field roles underpins “epistemological choices, structural necessities, and personal characteristics and preferences”. Taking a poststructuralist critical perspective in researching ESP/EMP which aims to deconstruct ideas of essentialism, observation was deployed with no pre-planned agenda or structure to gain a picture of what ‘is going on there’; how the English class is being delivered and how the English language is used in hospitals. As classroom and hospital observations were secondary data collection methods, I did not occupy the ‘complete membership’ role. Instead, I was a ‘complete observer’ according to Gold’s (1958) classification of participant observer roles in terms of involvement in and detachment from participation. The rationale for minimising the amount of data from observations was for the reason that my study is aimed at understanding the ESP situation from the “learning” perspective rather than the “teaching” so I was only interested in observing students’ behaviour in classroom in order to understand how student-teacher views about each other are manifested in the classroom.

In order to gain multi-dimensional, multi-source data stream, I deployed the observation tool which embeds immersion in a social setting and is suitable for “observing a social phenomenon in a case study” to record field notes of 3 hospital
visits and 6 English classes in the Faculty of Medicine during term 2 of the academic year 2009/2010 (Miles & Huberman, 1994). My path was smoothed by the English teachers whom I am friends with or at least had some connections in the past. I was given a carte blanche and I gained permission from the language teachers to attend their classes. I assumed a ‘covert’ role so that my identity as a researcher was not disclosed to students in an attempt to observe, as close as possible, a normal naturally occurring English class. As only year 1, 2 and 5 had English classes during term 2; I was able to observe two General English classes in year 1, and two EMP classes in year 2 and other two classes in year 5. Being a non-participant observer, my task was limited to taking field notes which Bond (1990) writes of as the “shorthand statements, aides-memoire that stimulate the re-creation, the renewal of things past” (p.244). The observation process was carried out concurrently with the student focus groups and teacher and student interviews. The three hospital visits were scheduled at the time of postgraduate student interviews, who no longer study an English subject, during their medical practice in hospital. The aim of the observation was to check whether medical students use English at the workplace during their postgraduate specialisation programme. Ditton (1977) alerted to the disadvantages of the covert role in observation that includes the problem of taking notes, the problem of not being able to use other methods, anxiety, and ethical problems. However, I had overcome them mainly because of the large classes in Syrian universities. I was not anxious about being spotted taking notes and I didn’t need to use other methods because my primary purpose was to take field notes as secondary data to focus groups. Nonetheless, I have to acknowledge that I may have created a potential damage to participants (students in the classroom) by not disclosing my identity as a researcher. As for the hospital observation, no one sounded attentive to my presence, except for my friend who allowed me access in, as they were doing their routine work.

2.3 Research process

2.3.1 A thousand mile journey starts with a single step

As “real-life settings belong to those in real life, not the researchers intruding into these settings” (Yin, 2011:114), gaining access to the research setting and participants was my first step through gaining permission from ESP teachers who were colleagues in the Higher Institute of Languages, and from officials in the institutions researched alongside
accessing documents from the Higher Institute of Languages. As for organising students’ focus group, the task was hard as I am not a member of the Faculty of Medicine so I had to gain access to students from different years of study through personal networking and confidential conversation with each FG participant. Time and other constraints limited my access but the positive side of this was that group members were not only classmates but friends; having mutual interests and background which helped the enrichment and smoothness of the FG discussions. The postgraduate students were also accessed through a doctor in Al Assad Hospital who introduced me to the students in the hospital and paved the way for my hospital observations. All interviewed students approved the meetings and voluntarily participated. The 3 medical doctors are acquaintances and were interviewed in their private clinics.

A pilot study was carried out with 5 medical students over internet calls to probe key issues of interest or concern for medical students who have studied medicine in Arabic at Tishreen University. Data was collected concurrently from different data sources (Figure6). The initial data collection plan was modified in the field due to students’ rejection of doing the writing task which was initially planned to engage students in reflective writings on the focus group discussions. The Focus Group (FG) sets were firstly designed to cover three broad themes of medical students’ English language learning experiences; the past (FG1), present (FG2), and future (FG3). Having rejected the narrative writing task after each focus group meeting, plan B was created during data collection process and employed and I had to transcribe the first FG discussions and code most of the recurring statements during the first meetings in FG1 to ask students later in FG2 to review the transcripts for feedback, make comments, corrections, changes, with agreement or disagreement so that I could maintain the collaboration and ethical relations with participants (Locke & Velamuri, 2009: 488–489). I gave them 30 minutes to check and discuss with others in a way that I attempted to check whether they would say the same things a week later or not. At this early stage of research, findings were not yet reached so, including myself, “the participants later cannot be accused of biasing the plan because anyone knew the nature of the findings.” (Yin, 2011:97). The feedback activity was devised in the field as an alternative technique because the nature of group interviewing makes the task harder on the researcher to reach a fair understanding of the reality of the statements uttered by students. Here, I recall issues of group dynamics and power relations which could,
inevitably, have a direct or indirect impact on the outcomes of the focus group discussions.

The aim in the second set of focus groups was to give a space for students to voice their present attitudes towards English and the role it plays in their perceptions of the ‘self’ as medical students. The second FG set was followed by a task of drawing a learning journey map from the past through up to the present to highlight critical moments of the students’ learning journey. I encountered a similar technique commonly referred to as ‘rivers of experience’ which is

> a reflexive tool since pupils, on their own or with the help of the researcher, draw it in ways that they feel are appropriate, linking it to critical incidents or moments in their lives: each bend of the river’s path marks a critical incident”. (Burnard, 2002: 2)

That was done as a plan B to the narrative task as it is short and less demanding in terms of written words needed. Taking in consideration Gardner’s Multiple Intelligences theory (1983) which suggests that human beings have multiple intelligences which are; musical, bodily-kinesthetic, logical-mathematical, linguistic, spatial, interpersonal, intrapersonal, naturalistic, intelligence and existentialist (Gardner, 2006), I tried to balance the verbal data I got from them in the focus groups with the imagery/textual ones. In the last FG3, students were grouped into two teams in the same FG meeting to articulate with drawing what they perceive the EMP course should be like. This task was also a backup plan to the failure of gaining written individual responses from students.

### 2.3.2 Data analysis

Patton (2002) writes that “each qualitative study is unique, the analytical approach used will be unique” (p.433). The nature of the inquiry as not bound with pre-assumptions about what is going on there. This rationalises and conforms to the poststructural notions of contesting universalities. As Dörnyei puts it:

> a primarily intuitive approach has to do with the inherent importance attached to the subjective and reflexive involvement of the researcher in the analysis and the need to maintain a fluid and creative analytical position that is not constrained by procedural traditions and that allows new theories to emerge freely”. (2007: 244)
The aim of the analysis is not to reach a reductive conclusion, rather to illuminate the complexity underpinning the research from start to finish. Hence, I adopt an analytical approach that goes with my assumptions which influenced the way I researched and collected data (Kvale, 1996). Analytic induction is the approach I took to handle the corpus of qualitative data. I adopted Madison’s (2005) general analysis procedure which introduces the need to create a point of view which reflects the theoretical stance I take in the research (i.e. critical). This emergent approach to data analysis seeks to “understand the situation and discover a theory implicit in the data itself” (Suter, 2006:329). Data were initially analysed during the data collection phase (Basit, 2003) to feed into other data from other sources in order to direct the research path. As the interviews were conducted in Arabic for practical reasons in this particular context where all interviewees were more comfortable and requested that Arabic is the language of the interviewing. For this reason, I had to meet their requests as my research aims at allowing this interaction to voice their opinions and if they were not comfortable enough I would have risked losing what could be of value to the research problem I raised in my study rationale.

The first stage of analysis started with transcription of the interview-based data which is “interpretive” in nature (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2008) and I, the researcher, solely transcribed the oral communication collected from the various research methods in this research and took the responsibility of converting the spoken data into texts for analysis including sentence construction (Tilley, 2003). Transcriptions were done in the language used in interviews (Arabic). Understanding the complexity of the transcribing process in qualitative research (Lapadat, 2000 and Lapadat & Lindsay, 1999), I could only treat the data transcripts as ‘frozen interpretive constructs’ (Miller & Crabtree, 1999:104) in a process of ‘retelling’ the story which was first told by the research respondents (Lapadat, 2000). Roberts (1997) puts this as:

> if talk is a social act, then so is transcription. As transcribers fix the fleeting moment of words as marks on the page, they call up the social roles and relations constituted in language and rely on their own social evaluations of speech in deciding how to write it. After all, transcribers bring their own language ideology to the task. In other words, all transcription is representation, and there is no natural or objective way in which talk can be written. (Roberts, 1997:167-168)

My personal influence on how the oral data were transferred into textual records is inevitable as “transcription is an act of interpretation and representation” and thus “an
act of power” (Bucholtz, 2000:1463). Nevertheless, as Poland, (1995) writes, “an attempt should be made to ensure that transcripts capture the utterances as closely as possible as they were audiotaped” (p. 295). Not to forget that parts; the nonverbal aspects of the original communication (cues such as gestures, eye movement, and body language) are missing. I worked my memory to remember how they were seated in the room and recognise their reactions and responses, who said which, since I had only met them once before the actual focus group meetings. As this study is situated within an interpretivist paradigm, I adopt Lapadat’s (2000) problematisation of transcription which takes an interpretivist perspective to transcribing data against the positivist one. Lapadat writes:

if we do not accept the notion of one true reality that can be uniquely recorded and fully represented in written text, how do we do and evaluate transcription? The challenge is to move from formulaic application of a transcription process with origins in positivistic assumptions about language, reality, and the researcher’s role, to a process that is sensitive to context, reflexive, and constructivist. (Lapadat, 2000: 209–210)

As the broad aim of the study is to understand the ESP at Tishreen University through collecting data from key informants in the Faculty, I tried to look at the ‘interplay’ between both “levels of analysis”; the individual students and the group as a whole (Morgan, 1997: 60). The nature of the research with the unstructured open focus groups discussions requires the analysis to be done in a non-quantitative coding system that discards numbers using a narrative-like reporting that creates the “balance between the direct quotation of the participants and the summarisation of their discussions” (ibid:64). Acknowledging the vitality of understanding “what the participants think”, I ran the focus groups discussions concurrently with the four groups to ensure some analysis is “built into the data collection itself- not left to the analyst’s post hoc speculation” (Morgan,1997:62). However, informants’ responses were not “viewed as reality reports delivered from a fixed repository” (Gubrium & Holstein, 2003:79). Rather, they were “considered for the ways that they construct aspects of reality in collaboration with the interviewer” (ibid).

Having transcribed the data in Arabic, I then coded them in English as it is the language I am more confident and competent to use in my research due to my education in English-medium institutions at the undergraduate ((English Literature and Linguistics) and postgraduate level (Applied Linguistics and TESOL). The initial coding was on hard-copy printouts first to sharpen my understanding of it. Next, as interviews were
digitally recorded, I used the high-quality qualitative data analysis software package NVivo (v.9) to transcribe the digital file sounds because it provides tools for handling complex data of the qualitative research. Such tools include

browsing and enriching text, coding it visually or at categories, annotating and gaining accessed data records accurately and swiftly... recording and linking ideas in many ways.... searching and exploring the patterns of data and ideas... It is designed to remove rigid divisions between "data" and "interpretation". (Richards, 1999:4)

When coding, I was looking for the “word or short phrase that symbolically a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data” (Saldaña, 2009:3). Sladaña notes that “no one, including myself, can claim final authority on the “best” way to code qualitative data” (p.47). Coding was done at two stages called the First and Second Cycles (Saldaña, 2009). In the First Cycle, provisional codes were created in the initial coding which requires that the researcher, remain “open to all possible theoretical directions by your readings of the data” (Charmaz, 2006: 46). I did the initial coding in NVivo through creating my first codes or nodes in the “free nodes” list such as students futuristic aspirations, arabisation, mother tongue rights, and inconsistency in teaching English (NVivo sample coding is in Appendix F). Alongside initial coding, themeing the data was done where themes emerged to identify “what a unit of data is about and/or what it means” (Saldaña, 2009:139). These categories and themes emerged from the data itself as I had not prepared as a predefined set of categories before the research was carried out (Ezzy, 2002:83). By using the “emergent” feature of the themes, I refer to that the codes were created by me based on my readings in the wider fields of ESP, EAP, language policy, arabisation of science and medicine, identity in second language acquisition, medium of instruction, critical pedagogy. The codes were created on degrees of importance and relevance to the problems I raised in the ESP situation at Tisheen University in Chapter 1. Through “thematising”, Kvale (1996) writes, “the interviewer does not uncover some pre-existing meanings, but supports the interviewees in developing their meanings throughout the course of the interview” (p.226). This is what I used as an interviewing strategy in all recorded interview types in this study. In writing the analysis, I was not interested in the quantitative analytical tools NVivo could provide. Rather, I was attentive to how much emphasis a given topic received among informants and “how much energy and enthusiasm the topic generated among the participants” (Morgan, 1997:63) especially in the focus groups where the choice of
topics reported in the data was based on “group-to-group validation” which combines all factors and in which a “topic comes up, …generates a consistent level of energy among a consistent proportion of the participants across nearly all groups” (ibid). For this reason, Nvivo was particularly useful although I had encountered several technical issues because of that the fact that my transcripts were written in Arabic so the texts were not fully clear when imported to NVivo.

In the second cycle of the analysis, the goal was “to develop a sense of categorical, thematic, conceptual, and/or theoretical organisation” from the previous codes “not necessarily to develop a perfectly hierarchical bullet-pointed outline or list of permanently fixed coding labels during and after this cycle of analysis” (Saldaña, 2009:149-150). Using the Axial Coding method, I examined the transcribed notes to reconfigure the overall codes to link categories with subcategories (Charmaz, 2006:60). The final step was the theoretical coding when “when no new information were to emerge during coding, that is, when no new properties, dimensions, conditions, actions/interactions, or consequences are seen in the data” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998: 136). At this stage, codes were reviewed, and categories and subcategories were organised under one core category to understand all the multi-layered problem of ESP field in Tishreen University (Sladaña, 2009:163). This final stage of coding was done manually to better handle my data and codes. The reason that I decided to do it manually was because I wanted to minimise any negative impact using an analytical computer software can have on interpreting data. In particular, using my memory alongside my engagement with data generation and interpretation enabled me to manage the complexity of the various emergent interwoven issues from imagery and observation data which I did not use NVivo for their analyses. Examples of this coding stage are the broad themes of: resistance to English inside the university, marginalisation of ESP teachers, and English and identity (see Appendix G for the list of themes from different data sources). The steps may appear to follow a systematic order, but the reality is more complicated as Clarke (2005) notes:

I propose that we complicate our stories, represent not only difference(s) but even contradictions and incoherencies in the data, note other possible readings, and at least note some of our anxieties and omissions. … We need to address head-on the inconsistencies, irregularities, and downright messiness of the empirical world—not scrub it clean and dress it up for the special occasion of a presentation or a publication. (p.105)
In addition, I added links in the margins of my coded transcripts to the relevant literature I am familiar with; a strategy called “memoing” (e.g. Dick, 2002) which is a process of adding relationships to link categories with each other to help me consider more general theoretical ideas in relation to the coded data. Finally, I interpreted the findings against the significance of the coded materials and its interconnections reflecting on the overall importance of findings for the research questions and research literature that have driven data collection (Bryman, 2004:409). However, considering the warns of Pavlenko (2007), I was cautious not to be driven by the major codes which I found significant, underplaying the importance of what the rest of the data may add up. I ensured I went through the data transcripts several times until no new things emerged (Richards, 2003) reaching “an account that is satisfactory” where I ensured having a sharp focus on each area of analysis (p.145).

2.4 My reflexive voice

Reflexivity of the researcher is significant throughout the research process; from research proposal writing stating the research problem, underpinning philosophical theories to the data collection procedures, analysis and interpretation (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). It is defined as “a bridging of the gap between epistemological concerns and method, trying to combine more philosophical informed aspects with what one is doing on the field” (Alvesson, 2002:15). In my study, it was integral for me to engage in critical reflexivity which, in Banister et al’s (1999) view, “centralises, rather than marginalises or denies, the influence of the researcher’s life experience on the research and the construction of knowledge” (Banister et al., 1999: 150). That was necessary to examine the influences that my relationships with informants may have had on the research process in order to “achieve a resonance between subjectivity and objectivity” (ibid). In the first place, to ensure being a reflexive researcher, I had to scrutinise my background as an ex-student and teacher in the research institution and my past experiences with some of the research participants to assess to minimise the impact on handling the data transcripts and interpretation.

In the focus group discussions, my role was as “a moderator” not “an interviewer”. I took part in the discussions by giving my own views on the topics under discussion and I exchanged my own reflection on my previous learning and teaching experiences so that I transcended the boundary that could be created between me and them. I was
guiding students’ discussion by using a “guide” in which I recorded emerging topics and other broad issues which were relevant to the theme of each focus group so that I could provoke more discussion to “help channel the discussion without necessarily forcing the group into a predetermined mould” (Morgan, 1997:48). The focus groups were conducted in the light of the importance of their “emerging voices” where I attempted to “deprivilege” my agency as a researcher and instead privileged the “interviewee’s agency” […] “to make evident his or her own sense of identity and representational practices” (Fontana, 2003:51). I was at times, stuck when students would discuss medicine-related issues they face in the Faculty of Medicine but I prioritised as natural-occurring interaction as possible among them.

In the semi-structured interviews with teachers, I had a short interview “guide” which included broad themes of focus but I gave the space for the teachers to talk as long they preferred on a certain issue according to its personal importance. This was not hard to moderate as teachers seemed to take the initiative and expressed enthusiasm in the discussions. In the semi-structured interviews with university officials and postgraduate medical students in the hospital, I was a total “interviewer” due to time constraints as officials did not welcome long discussions and medical postgraduate students were on work shifts and preferred rather direct questions than open discussions. The questions addressed in the student semi-structured interviews were elicited from my initial thematisation of the emergent topics from the first two student focus group discussions which I ran concurrently with classroom and hospital observation and the semi-structured interviews. I do not claim that I recorded the perfect-natural occurring phenomenon because the teachers already knew about me and they were asking me for evaluation and recommendations for better teaching. I have to acknowledge the power exerted unintentionally by me, as the other teachers looked at me as a PhD candidate in the United Kingdom and they expressed their awareness of the social mobility that, in their opinion, privileged me over them. In the hospital visits, I felt I was an intruder into the medicine territory. In classroom observations, I took a dual role as both insider and outsider since I had previously worked as an ESP teacher for 2 years in the same institution and I am familiar with the context under study, including knowledge of the curriculum and organisation of teaching and learning there. Hence, I acknowledge that I was not a total outsider and I found myself referring to my previous teaching experience when taking the observational field notes (Bryman, 2004).
As part of my reflection on the research process, I borrow two terms from anthropology “emic” (insider) and “etic” (outsider) (Pike, 1954) which have been become widely used in social sciences (Headland, Pike & Harris, 1990). My research stance is, unquestionably, that of an “insider” who “conducts studies with populations, communities, and identity groups of which they are also members” (Kanuha, 2000: 439). I was an “insider” simply because I conducted the research in my own university in my hometown of Latakia in Syria where I was raised, educated, and lived for the 25 years of my life. Nonetheless, although I was an “insider” only to a certain degree, being familiar with Tishreen University where I had studied and where I had a reasonable amount of teaching experience, I occasionally felt like an “outsider” in the student focus groups due to my lack of medical background and unfamiliarity with medical tutors, let alone my 5 year absence from the country for the purpose of education abroad. Another issue was that of the academic background. The ESP teachers I interviewed looked at me in appraisal of being a PhD candidate in a British institution so education and life in the UK were among the topics they exchanged with me. Age was another issue as I was less comfortable in interviewing students in year 1, 2, and 3 who are too young compared to the ESP teachers and the medical tutors I interviewed. Being an “insider” has influenced on data interpretation and writing as “all writing is “positioned within a stance” and as Creswell (2007) notes, “how we write is a reflection of our own interpretation based on the cultural, social, gender, class, and personal politics that we bring to research” (p.179). Having acknowledged that, and since “no longer it is acceptable to be the omniscient, distanced qualitative writer” (Creswell, 2007:178), I agree with Creswell’s assertion that “qualitative researchers need to accept this interpretation and be open about it in their writings” (ibid: 179). Hence, writing my thesis came forward on “a continuum between the declarative and the subjunctive”, between the “is-ness” and the “perhaps-ness” utterances (Pelias, 2011: 660). I also realised through writing that I was engaged in a dynamic process of discovery of my subject of inquiry and myself as a researcher. This point is well-defined by Richardson (2000) as writing is

not merely the transcribing of some reality. Rather, - of all the texts, notes, presentations, and possibilities- is also a process of discovery: discovery of the subject (and sometimes of the problem itself) and discovery of the self. (cited in Denzin & Lincoln, 2011:124)
2.5 Trustworthiness

Consistent with the poststructuralist notion of the rejection of universalism, issues of quality and rigour of such qualitative research informed by poststructuralism and complexity theory cannot be addressed in positivistic terminology (i.e., validity). Rather, I prefer to use the notion of “trustworthiness” as it does a fair reference to informants in this study as human beings whose reality is never stable and dynamic. To ensure trustworthiness, I used multiple data sources for the sake of attempting to gain as close picture to reality through engaging multiple voices including undergraduate and postgraduate medical students across all years of study, ESP teachers, management personnel, and medical doctors without undermining my role as an ex-member of the institution under investigation. Doubtless to say, my objectivity is questioned as a human being; my voice role had been acknowledged earlier in section 2.4 as part of the reflexivity process that distinguishes this type of research and which account for the researcher’s values and beliefs as constituents of the construction of the data analysis and in the research process as a whole. However, as Carr and Kemmis (1986: 122) note, there is no objective reality unless “participants reveal willingness to make their view and preconceptions for critical inspection and to engage in discussion and argument that is open and impartial”. Having engaged myself in critical reflexivity to establish the resonance between subjectivity and objectivity, I also used multiple sources of data including documents analysis, open-ended semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and classroom and hospital observation in an attempt to engage as many players in this complex situation.

Because I was unable to stay in Syria for a longer period due to scholarship regulations, I could only perform the “member checking” procedure (Lincoln & Guba, 1985: 314) with my focus group informants where I shared the initial analysis of the discussions in “feedback sheets” (see sample in Appendix H) which were distributed to students to check that their points of view have been well-interpreted and to establish a degree of credibility. In the first cycle of coding I used this particularly useful strategy as some of students failed to recall their own expressed views in the previous focus group discussion which was only conducted in the previous week. This assures the impossibility of gaining an identical reality of the stories people tell. Memory, social and interpersonal need and motivations are all features of human beings (Richards, 2003:92). Hence, I cannot claim to generalise findings of this research although other local contexts may be similar in some aspects. In the end, stories are told differently by
different tellers and they are open to interpretations. That includes the reader as a researcher like myself, a reader of this thesis as a supervisor, as an examiner, as a peer wherein each will have a different reading and interpretation. This should not, nonetheless, be seen as a flaw since the researcher and informants are human beings who have different system of beliefs and values and which may change naturally over time since our identities are fluid and non-static.

In terms of the “prolonged engagement” in research as a method of maintaining trustworthiness, I established rapport with research participants especially with themedical students and ESP teachers (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Erlandson et al. 1993). The six ESP teachers are colleagues of mine in the Higher Institute of Language. As Richards (2003:87) posits:

> Everything we say, and the way we say it, is affected by our relationship with the people we’re talking to, the circumstances in which we speak, relevant past experiences, things we might already have said, and so on.

The relatively good relationship with them allowed free informal honest discussions in the interviews as I, unconsciously, exchanged my own reflection on my previous teaching experience in the interviews so my teacher informants talked to me not as an interviewer but as a colleague whom they relate to. As for students, student informants in the focus groups were colleagues, acquaintances, or friends to maintain as high level of trust and honesty as possible. However important the establishment of rapport with informants is, it influenced my initial data analysis. I acknowledge that the first themes and categories I developed were subjective due to my empathy with student informants and the mutual concerns and feelings I had shared with the ESP colleagues. It was only when I came back to the UK that I began to scrutinise and rethink my coding of the transcripts.

### 2.6 Ethical considerations

To keep within the standards of ethical educational research, I had to be aware of the ethical issues that may rise from the conduct of this research that involves human participants. Conforming to the British Educational Research Association’s (BERA) ethical guidelines (BERA, 2011), voluntary informed consent was gained from participants prior to data collection. Student participants volunteered to participate in the
research after I had explained the nature of the research and after they proposed conducting the interviews in the mother tongue (Arabic), out of interest in the researched topic. Teacher participants were also cooperative and gave their unconditional consents. Interviewing medical doctors and senior officials would not have been possible without their confirmed interest and consent.

Pring (2004:148) emphasises our duties of respect for our research participants who are in “position of vulnerability”. Hence, I guaranteed the democratic atmosphere interviewing by looking at participants’ roles and mine as irrespectively vital. I was mindful of Pring’s (2004) question “does the researcher have to balance the right to know against the possible harm which might follow from the conduct … and dissemination of the research?” (ibid). As a researcher, I have the ‘right to know’ but I have a responsibility towards participants and should guarantee not to bring harm to them at any stage of the research process. In one occasion, for the purpose of research, ‘making disclosure’ of my identity as a research was not possible to students in the observed English classes as the “research design specifically requires it to ensure that the appropriate data is collected” (BERA, 2011: 6). Observation is secondary in the research; I only took field notes and did not cause any harm to the participants. I could not be open to them otherwise the class would not be as close to a naturally-occurring event as possible.

The right to withdraw should never be dismissed in research no matter what position the participants occupy in the research. Therefore, I informed the participants of their right to withdraw at any stage even when the research is underway. I obtained their written permission on a consent form (see sample in Appendix B). This study is not meant to be unethical as the critical inquiry aims at equal opportunity and awareness of power relations. Although student participant expressed their approval of disclosing their identities, I was mindful of major ethical conditions such as confidentiality and non-identifiability (anonymity) which are aspects of “privacy”. This was maintained by using pseudonyms for all research participants in the data treatment and when disseminating the research results. All interview recordings were saved in security-enabled folders on my personal computer and no one except myself have access to them. (BERA, 2011:5-8). Finally, as a research student at the University of Exeter, I was required to conform to the ethical position of the Graduate School of Education. A
Student Ethical Research Approval Form had been submitted to the School’s Ethics Committee and a scanned copy of it is attached to the back of the thesis in Appendix A.

Discussing ethics, it is inevitable not to bring in the reflexivity of the researcher. As a researcher, I cannot deny having my personal agenda whether it is political, social, or educational which could have influenced my approach to data collection, handling, interpreting in order to reach a particular end. I have taught in the researched context and I am part of the University as an ex-student and a current member of staff. Having this agenda may raise ethical issues about human values who are constituents of a society. To avoid falling in the trap of subjective interests, I have to illuminate that I had no particular interest in getting particular results as I do not have hypotheses prior to the conduct of research. My sole attempt was to understand the complexity of a teaching and learning situation which has origins in my professional and personal concerns as explained in Chapter 1. However, data emerged to provide an understanding of ESP which I believe to be of a complex nature. To these ends, being reflexive in the process of knowledge production, I can ensure that this study was carried out within the standards of ethics especially that it embraces the poststructural school of thought where the research participants were not treated as “deprivileged”. Rather, they were viewed as agents negotiating the construction of realities where power relations count and shape the direction of the research itself.

**Summary**

This chapter presented the research investigatory framework including an account of the research theoretical/methodological perspective informed by aspects of poststructuralism and complexity theory alongside the onto-epistemology of “becoming”. Next, the research design was discussed including the methodology, research questions, research setting, participants, and methods of data generation. The research process from preparing the pilot study to getting to the field through to data analysis procedures followed. Then, I acknowledged my positionality in the research and provided an account of the research trustworthiness. Finally, research ethical considerations were stated. Having presented the theoretical/methodological framework, I move next to present artefacts related to language issues in Syria, in the course of which, analysis of language policy documents is provided as the first stage of data generation.
CHAPTER THREE: ISSUES IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING IN SYRIAN HIGHER EDUCATION

3. Introduction

In the previous chapter, I demonstrated that a poststructural-complexity framework can best help me analyse and understand the EMP complex system at Tishreen University. As part of the process of data generation, policy documents were collected and will be presented in this chapter accompanied with a broad background to the Syrian context to mark the point of departure to collect and analyse data from other sources. By providing this macro description of the local context, the aim of this chapter is to unpick the most significantly relevant issues in English language teaching in Syrian Higher Education to understand the shift towards upgrading the level of English and English for Specific Purposes in Syrian Education. At the forefront is the presentation of the inherent historical, ideological, linguistic, and economic aspects of the country with a special reference to the role of Arabic as the sole official language of Syria. The chapter proceeds towards a more specific description of the Syrian education system to outline language policies and the role of English as the country’s first foreign language (EFL) in education. The chapter ends with an outline of the most recent relevant language policy changes in relation to English and English for Specific Purposes in higher education.

3.1 Historical ideological educational linguistic overview

In order to understand the EMP educational situation at Tishreen University and how language policy has changed in Syria, this section aims to trace the historical ideological issues and their impact on education and language in the country drawing on official policy documents and other published sources. Syria has a long history but, purposefully, I begin with the era of the Ottoman occupation (1516-1918) when the first Medical School was established and continue to post-independence era when Arab-nationalism and Arabisation became highly significant in the country’s policy.

In the Ottoman Empire, Turkish was the official language and the educational system in Syria was characterised by its “fragmentation”. It varied from Islamic education (from elementary Quranic schools to advanced religious schools) to Christian education.
through the foreign missionaries (Schumann, 2001:179-180). The historical climax of reform that the Ottomans initiated in Greater Syria (that includes Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and Palestine at the time) was the foundation of a medical school in Damascus in 1903 which was re-established by King Faysal in 1919 and finally turned out as the nucleus of the University of Damascus. What was noticeable is that illiteracy rate increased because no equal opportunities were provided as access to education was subject to class classification so “land-owning class or the urban bourgeoisie were at the top social educational hierarchy” (ibid: 180).

At the end of World War I, the Ottoman Empire ceased to exist. During the first years of the 1920s, France was assigned the mandate of Syria and Lebanon. The French Mandate did not change the education system much but school enrolment rate increased as primary level education was prioritised while secondary education remained a ‘private initiative’. French became the country’s second language in schools and government where literate (through schooling in French) and illiterate (through communication with the French) mastered its spoken forms. Access to education, unlike being limited to high class well-off individuals in the Ottoman period, was noticeable among lower middle class people who immersed in education during the French Mandate period through the scholarships offered to pursue secondary and higher education (ibid:181).

With the spread of education, radical nationalism started to emerge marking the period between 1930 and 1958 as “crucial” in the history of nationalism in Syria and Lebanon which were under the French Mandate. This process was accompanied by the increase of radical thoughts on nationalism which reflected the growing political self-confidence of the educated new middle class which called for modernisation and nationalist education to transform the society to better cope with the Western civilisation (ibid: 174-175).

3.1.1 Post-independence era

The deep-rooted history of colonialism of Syria by the Ottoman Turks and the French implanted the rejection of foreign ideologies among the Syrians. A sense of “injustice” was accordingly felt as a result of the mistrust of the West alongside “an acute realisation of Syrian's economic and social underdevelopment in comparison with modern industrialised nations” following the defeat in the Arab-Israeli war in 1948
(Collelo, 1987:60). All the above and the fact that Syria “was the ancient cradle of civilisation and, during the Umayyad era, the world's preeminent empire” contributed to the emergence of an “indigenous ideology of Arab renaissance and resurrection and the rejection of foreign ideologies”. However, Syria’s anti-Western attitude lessened gradually as the country moved towards establishing a tolerant society.

3.1.2 Pan-Arab nationalism

The Syrian society is a mosaic of different ethnic and religious groups speaking several languages. 80% of the Syrian population is Arabs. It is hard to define what an Arab is. Syrians are commonly categorised as an Arab people (as are most of the other now Arabic-speaking people in the Arab world) by virtue of their modern-day language and bonds to Arab culture and history. They are in fact largely a blend of the various groups indigenous to the region who were at one time largely Christian and Aramaic speaking but who became ‘arabised’ and the large majority converted to Islam, following the Muslim conquest of Syria. Syrians today, whether Muslim or Christian, are a thoroughly arabised people. (Ahmed, 2010:73)

The main non-arabised ethnic minorities are Kurds, Turkmen, Assyrian/Syriacs Christians. The languages are Arabic (the official language), Kurdish, Armenian, Aramaic, Circassian, English and French (foreign languages). The Arab world is mainly Muslim but Syrians were aware that using Islam as the ‘defining criterion of Arabism’ could incite discrimination and offence to the other Syrian religious minorities. Adopting a “secular” rather than “religious” attitude, Syrians have stressed, after independence in 1946, the notion of the cultural heritage of all Arabs (Arabs who live in the countries of the Arab world (mapped in Figure 9), and Arabic as the driving forces of Arab unity irrespective of religion or ethnicity. This “pan-Arab unity is a moot issue in Syria, an ideal rather than a practical policy” (ibid). This notion is manifested among all Syrians who champion the idea of crossing boundaries created by the pervious colonial powers to unite Arabs in one nation (the Arab Nation) from the Atlantic Ocean to the Arabian Sea (Collelo, 1987:59). This ideology still enjoys its high esteem in the old Syrian constitution and its most recent updated version,

The Syrian Arab Republic is proud of its Arab identity and of its people forming an integral part of the Arab nation, manifested in ongoing national and regional contributions and an ongoing endeavour to support Arab cooperation towards unity of the Arab nation. (The Syrian Constitution, 2012/Introduction)
In line with pan-Arab nationalism, in the post-independence era (1946), policy continued to prioritise arabisation and Arabic in all fields. The following changes in the educational system and foreign language policy occurred, impacted by the political changes in the country:

a. The arabisation of school and university education in 1946. Arabic became the medium of instruction for all subjects.

b. The introduction of English language for the first time in the same year. This was when a decision was taken that English should replace French as the first foreign language and links with the occupation should be minimised. (Mleiki, 1997:29)

With regards to foreign language policy in the French-controlled country, English had no status until the end of the French mandate in 1946. English then became the first foreign language in Syria (Al- Fakeer, 2002). In the late 20th Century, French teaching persisted in schools and universities as an optional foreign language while English attracted the majority of the Syrians as their top foreign language due to growing interest in it as the world language of business, technology, science and communication. The rationale behind the shift to Arabic instead of French as medium of instruction conformed with the call for “national unity and the sense of belonging historically to the Arab World” and the need to enable students “to understand more fully and easily subject-matter which was currently taught in French” (Sandouk, 1992:8).
3.1.3 Arabisation and Arabic in Syrian education

Arabisation and Islamisation can implicitly be seen as twins. Arabisation is conceived as “a political act” that makes Arabic the official language in the Arab countries alongside the development of foreign language learning. Arabisation started in Syria in 1919 in Damascus University which, at that time, had only two faculties; Law and Medicine. Ever since, Arabic has been rooted in national pride and represented as the language of science in higher education. The Faculty of Medicine in Damascus has been a pioneer in coining terms and dictionaries in Arabic, and writing books in Arabic which means that Arabic can compete with other foreign languages as long as its speakers remain loyal to its use (Al-Haffar, 1993:19-20).

The arabisation movement in Syria embraced arabisation of education at primary, secondary and tertiary level without dismissing other living foreign languages. Al-Haffar (1993) defines it as a call to “democratise science and popularise it among all Arabs” instead of restricting it to one distinct group—the one that masters English and “secretly exchanges and monopolises it” (ibid: 16). Many publications have been devoted to the study of arabisation of science and medicine and the importance of the Arabic in medicine (Mahfouz, 1997; Al-Mutawa, 2000; Khoury, 2002; Al-Zakiri, 2002; Ali, 2005; and Mohammad, 2007) with a bulk of published research in the Arab countries favouring medical education in the mother tongue, Arabic, based on evidence of problems faced by students instructed in a foreign language.

Arabic is the 4th largest language of the world in the population of first-language speakers. At present, “Arabic is the state's official language” (Article 4, the Syrian constitution). However, as will be explained later in (3.4.4), new educational development reforms, among which is the foreign language policy, have been initiated and all affected by the political and economic climate.

Arabisation and the importance of Arabic are intertwined topics as seen in some Arab medical publications such as The Arabisation of Medicine Journal, where a special section is dedicated to the Arabic language, its role and importance. The Arab Academy in Syria which was officially established in 1919 is the oldest academy of its kind in the Arab world. It is concerned with enhancement of the Arabic language in education and services and it has played a vital role in the arabisation movement to restore Arabic back from the Ottoman language influence and later from the influence of the French language during the French Mandate (Arab Academy, 2010). Lately, the head of the
Arabic language academy stressed that there is no threat to Arabic as “it is deeply rooted in our sons’ and ancestors’ that globalisation cannot, by any means, take over it.” (SANA, 2010).

Syria initiated an enhancement project to develop Arabic at the Arab national level as the issue is “a matter of deep-rooted culture, identity and belonging” and awareness should be raised among Arabs, in the modern ICT world, to restore the status of Arabic among other living languages (SANA, 2009). The project was first initiated by President Bashar Al Assad, Head of State, at his inauguration in 2000. He stressed that Arabic should be at the centre of life as “it is part of our history, culture and identity and it exists with us, in our syllabi, media, and education. Like other living languages, it gradually develops and booms” (SANA, 2009).

The Committee for the Enhancement of the Arabic Language was established by State Decree (4) in 2007. This Committee, based in Syria, has cooperated with the Arab Organisation for Education, Culture and Science and presented the work plan, strategies, and results. Among these strategies were updating the Arabic syllabus, the use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT), lifelong learning, the Arabisation of science and technology alongside developing foreign language teaching and learning, the increased interest in linguistic research particularly terminology, vocabulary and dictionaries, the use of Arabic in ICT and its application in the Arabic language, and finally automated translation.

The national work plan to enhance and retain Arabic has led to the following initiatives:

1. Set committees of enhancement of Arabic in state ministries (Education, Higher Education, Culture, Media and Endowment.
2. Varied committees across country’s governorates are set up to ensure having Arabic names instead of foreign names on commercial and service shops and advertisements.
3. Lectures on linguistic awareness in cultural centres and societies are held frequently alongside TV workshops on the importance of mother tongues.
4. In higher education, all teaching staff in universities and institutions are abided by law to use standard Arabic in their lectures and at master’s and doctorate examination boards. (SANA, 2009)

I bring in concrete pictures of retail shops display signs in Syria which illustrate how Syria is attached to Arab ideology and Arab identity through imposing a policy that
requires all display signs to include a translated version of any foreign name whenever applies.

The 6th Conference for the Arabisation of Medical Sciences organised by the World Health Organisation-Middle East regional office was held at the headquarters of the Arab Academy in Damascus in 2008. It discussed varied topics such as the requirements of Arabic-medium teaching, the arabisation of medicine, requirements for teaching health sciences in Arabic, university medical textbooks, terminology and medical dictionaries, translation, and encouraging lectures to use Arabic discourse at university. The common issues covered in a conference such as this were: the heritage of the Arabic language which is a symbol of culture and civilisations. It has embraced science and knowledge for a long time in history and was once a primary source for the western scientists and the evidence can be seen in the existence of Arabic words in all western languages (SANA, 2008).

In the health sector, since independence, the Ministry of Health (MoH) has been mindful of having Arabic as the primary communication medium in all health centres, hospitals, workshops, medical leaflets, and training programmes. There is cooperation with the Arab Programme in the World Health Organisation aiming at unifying medical

Figure 8: Examples of public use in Syria
terminology in Arabic in the Unified Medical Dictionary (UMD), a multilingual medical dictionary which was firstly compiled in the late 1960s and early 1970s with the issue of its first edition (English/Arabic) in 1973. The UMD became the sole recognised reference for medical terminology, health and its development. The Ministry also organised a subcommittee to ensure the use of the modern standard Arabic language (ibid).

3.2 Syrian economic context in relation to education

Since 2001, realising the need for economic reform to improve living standards, the Syrian government has implemented liberalisation of its economy to shift from state control towards a social market economy. The rationale for ‘liberalisation’ and ‘deregulation’ of the economy is a response to “international trends such as globalisation and increasing economic integration” (Warden, 2006:99). The aim is to revive the domestic economy becoming more involved in international trade and move to join the globalisation process. Despite of this move, the issue remains controversial as “centralised state planning” still continues to exist in the Syrian economy (ibid: 100-103).

Syria has collaborated with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to analyse poverty in Syria before embarking on this economic reform. It has removed barriers to the private sector in most industries and the banking sector, as well as schools and universities thus allowing a diversity of career opportunities for young people lessening the burden on the public sector which is the main employer in Syria. It also initiated reform towards less heavy-handed government intervention in institutions, including more flexible labour laws, changes in the public education system, and social protection programs (Kabbani, 2009:1).

In order to proceed towards a market economy, the government has realised that small medium enterprise (SME) “development and privatisation remain major priorities for the economic reform process” alongside the awareness of the need for “training and human resources development” which the government is oriented to through the European Training Foundation (ETF) that provides the government with the “principles of the Euro-Med Charter for SMEs, to support EU initiatives” (ETF Note, 2010:3). In the context of the country’s broad development plans, the Syria Trust for Development; a non-governmental, non-profit organisation was established in 2007 under the
Chairmanship of Her Excellency Mrs Asma Al Assad, the First Lady of Syria. This was driven by the Syrian government’s will to "partner[ing] with these organisations [NGOs] … to try and develop the best development strategy for the country…This is a moment where civil society and the private sector have to challenge [the government] in a positive way to see how far the government is willing to open up the space” (Sinjab, 24 January 2010). The aim of this organisation is to “empower people from all walks of life to play a full role in building and shaping their society” and “encourage individuals and communities to be positive agents of change”. The projects undertaken in partnership with local communities, other NGOs and charities, government and the private sector go under three broad themes – learning; rural development; and culture and heritage (Syria Trust for Development, 2010).

3.3 Education and the English language in Syria

3.3.1 The education expenditure

The economic changes have had its impact on education and foreign language teaching. Over the past half century, employment and the education system in Syria have been dominated by the public sector with evidence of low labour productivity and low returns to education. The public sector is the main employer and “some educated young people prefer to wait for jobs in the public sectors which offer better wages and more generous non-wage benefits” (ETF Note, 2010:2). Since the start of the economic reform in 2001, the government has increased financial support (public and private) for education as part of the extensive bold reform efforts in the public education system which were “significant” and “merely brought Syria in line with the rest of the world” (Kabbani & Salloum, 2011:11). Private universities are English-medium, one of which is the University of Kalamoon (UOK) established in 2003 and will be referenced to in the data-based Chapter 4. The increased investment in education (increasing its total expenditure from 12.6 percent in 2000 to 15.7 percent in 2005 to increase of the ratio of education expenditure to GDP from 2.7 percent to 4.3 percent), has raised literacy rates in Syria and now about 80 per cent of the Syrian population is literate (ibid).

Syrians are aware of the value of “education as a means of social progress” and the country embraces the view that “sustained employee development and training is seen as an investment for future generations”, not to mention the government’s awareness of “the added value of education to the world of work….to produce a qualified and
competent workforce to meet the economic and social needs of Syrians”. The reform initiated by the government addressed improving the “quality of education” and the “current infrastructure” (Ménacère, 2009). Syria allowed the establishment of private secondary schools and universities, and parallel and open learning in the public universities whose tuition fees are part paid by the students. This increased university enrolment in private or semi-private higher education to over one third. Parallel with the reform, the Ministry of Education has been revising the school curricula “in order to make the educational content more demand-driven and responsive to the needs of the labour market” (Kabbani & Salloum, 2011:98). Public universities have also been following the same steps and the Ministry of Higher Education has increased the salaries of university professors to motivate them to work full time for the university. The Syrian government has also established higher institutes with external financial and technical support (ibid). These changes occurred at the time when English language policy has also changed and English for Specific Purposes began to take its share of demand from the policy makers in the Ministry of Education and Ministry of Higher Education. This will be discussed in next section.

3.3.2 Syrian educational system

1. Education is a right guaranteed by the state, is provided free across all levels, and the law regulates education in the cases where education is paid for at universities and government institutions.

2. Education is compulsory throughout the elementary stage, and the state undertakes to extend compulsory education to other stages.

3. The state supervises education and regulates its approach in order to achieve consistency with community needs and the requirements of development.

4. The law shall regulate the supervision of state over private educational institutions. (Article 29, the Syrian constitution)

This section describes the hierarchal policy making and the structure of the educational system in order to understand how the system works before moving further to the position of the English language in the curriculum in state schools and universities. In 1981, education became free and compulsory from grade 1-6. As of 2002/2003, basic education (primary 1-4 and intermediate 5-9) started to become free and compulsory according to Law No.32 of 7April 2002 (UNESCO IBE, 2011). For the last half century, education in Syria has been mainly state-run and financed until the arrival of
private schools and universities which were opened at the start of the extensive reform in the country in 2001 (Kabbani & Salloum, 2009).

The Higher Education system in Syria is centralised with a hierarchy of decision making as illustrated in Figure 9.

![Hierarch of policy decision making](image)

The Ministry of Higher Education are central authorities that take educational policy decisions including curriculum design, teaching aims and specification of learning outcomes and teaching material and support (Sandouk, 1992:5). At the top is the Council of Higher Education which consists of representatives of universities, teachers and students, and representatives of Ministries of Education, Health, Planning and Higher Education. It is responsible for policy making and planning of teaching and scientific research in higher education in all its disciplines and levels in the light of the country's general agenda. Secondly comes the University Council which links to the council of higher education and subsequently to the minister. Then the Faculty comes third. Rigid institutional structures inside universities shape the Syrian students’ learning behaviour as “credential-seeking” rather than “developing knowledge and skills demanded by the labour market” (Kabbani & Salloum, 2009:2-5).
The first national exam in the pre-university education level is in the 9th grade which determines the entry to the secondary schools or vocational secondary schools. In the 11th grade, students choose to study Arts or Sciences. The second and final national exam is that of 12th grade (the baccalaureate) whose credential is required for university-level studies admission (Ménacère, 2009). Admission to the Medical Faculties in Syria has always required the attainment of the top grades in the baccalaureate/scientific section.

Universities in Syria are generally overcrowded due to the high number of students compared to the small number of universities and the facilities and resources are
insufficient to cater for large classes (Holliday & Cooke, 1982; Dalbani, 1992). Syria applies the French model of higher education. The university stages and the academic degrees awarded are:

1- Undergraduate: the ‘Licence’ awarded after 4 years to 6 years (only Medicine) depending on the subject of study.
2- Postgraduate: diplôme d'études approfondies (DEA) or diplôme d'études supérieures spécialisées (DESS) - 1-2 year postgraduate degree equivalent to the Master’s degree in the British - American systems.
3- Postgraduate: the doctorate - 3-5 years following on from the DEA or an equivalent degree. (Ménacère, 2009)

Alongside university level studies, teacher education is provided including the following: Training of primary/basic and secondary school teacher, and training of higher education teachers (Ministry of Higher Education, 2004).

3.3.3 English in Syrian education

Syria has retained Arabic as the official language and the language of instruction at all education levels and is celebratory of its unique and successful experience in teaching through the medium of Arabic especially in the faculties of medicine in its universities. The monolingual standard language ideology in Syria is closely linked with the powerful ideologies on Arab-nationalism and national unity as described earlier in this chapter. This type of policy is referred to by Schmidt (1998) as a ‘centralist policy’ in which “national security and national unity are linked with a dominant language, and the dominant ethno linguistic group sustains its control of political and economic power by rationalising the exclusion of other languages from public domains, particularly education. Centralist policies often rely upon a standard language ideology and a discourse of nationalism and national unity” (cited in Tollefson, 2002:180).

According to Fairclough (1989), “ideologies are closely linked, to power… because they are a means of legitimising existing social relations and differences of power... Ideologies are closely linked to language, because using language is the commonest form of social behaviour, and the form of social behaviour where we rely most on 'common-sense' assumptions” (p.2). This marriage between language, power and ideology leads one to predict that Arabic will persist as the medium of instruction; a policy that appears “to be a natural outgrowth of the historical situation…linked to
powerful ideologies of nation and national identity” (Fairclough, 1989 in Tollefson, 2002:179).

English as medium of instruction has been a scholarly debatable issue. The use of Arabic as a medium of instruction was researched widely in the 1980s and 1990s in the Arab world with major findings favouring Arabic over English as medium of instruction because of students’ low proficiency in English which impedes comprehension of the scientific subjects (see Al-Hajj Eissa & Al-Mutawa, 1988 in Kuwait; Abu-Hiloo & Lutfiya, 1984 in Jordan; Assuahmni & Al-Barr, 1992 and Al-Sebaee, 1995 in Saudi Arabia; Jarallah & Al-Ansari, 1998 in Jordan, Lebanon and Egypt). Students are expected to reach an understanding of scientific discourse or concepts in a second language which makes the comprehension task harder (Prophet & Dow, 1994; Bunyi, 1999). In the 21st Century, more studies have been carried out on the use of English as a medium of instruction after English has significantly seemed to replace Arabic, especially in Arabian Gulf countries, and concerns emerged about the impact this policy might have on the Arab identity of the young generation (Sharif, 2011). For example, Troudi (2009a, 2009b) has questioned the use of English as medium of instruction in the UAE and the Arab world and its effect on Arabic as a language of science and academia. He points out that the major/minor distinction between languages is determined by “the usership of a particular language and not its importance” and argued that Arabic is a major language of hundreds of millions of speakers but it is currently “being pushed back into a minor role in post-secondary education” (ibid: 195-196) (Al-Askari, 2002; Al-Dhubaib, 2006; Mohamed, 2007; Al-Jarf, 2008).

In most educational systems in developing societies, the teaching of English from a young age or the use of English as a medium of instruction is now widespread but often highly problematic (Bolton, Graddol, & Meierkord, 2011: 474). Research on language policy has been concerned with the impact of the spread of English on first and minority language (Phillipson, 1992; Pennycook, 1994; Canagarajah, 1999; Crystal, 2000; Shorris, 2000; Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000; Nunan, 2003; Zughoul, 2003; May, 2006; Troudi, 2007). For example, Skutnabb-Kangas (2000:5) noted that “linguistic diversity is disappearing” and Phillipson (1992:27) explained that “English is both replacing other languages […] and displacing them”. Macedo, Dendiros & Gounari (2003) approach language policy from a critical perspective to illuminate the negative impact of the wrong choice of the language of instruction on the cultural identities of individuals which “usually leave an indelible psychological scar experienced even by
those subordinated people who seemingly have made it in spite of all forms of oppression” (2003: 77). Many studies, according to Al-Haffar (1993:27) in Arab countries and the world showed that the use of foreign language in education, in teaching science and technology in particular, generates a feeling of inferiority in students that can last a lifetime. It seeds the feeling that science and technology are monopolised by the “West” and alien to non-western societies which consequently leads to feelings of constant depression and national deficiency (Al-Haffar, 1993:27).

Recalling the literature on the rights of languages and linguistic genocide and imperialism (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000 and Phillipson, 2000), the unique Syrian experience of teaching medicine in Arabic stands as a country case where national mother tongue language rights are retained. The Syrian experience of the arabisation of science and medicine and the use of Arabic as the medium of instruction in education has been successful and has sustained Arab national cultural and linguistic identity. As Skutnabb-Kangas puts it, maintaining one’s mother tongue is a “self-evident, fundamental individual linguistic human right” and people from the periphery have the right “to exist and to reproduce themselves as distinct groups, with their own languages and cultures” is “a self-evident, fundamental collective human right” (Skutnabb-Kangas, 1998:22, author’s emphasis). Nonetheless, Syria seems heading towards what is referred to in the Japanese context as a combination of Anglicisation and nationalism (Kubota, 2001). The drive towards teaching core medical subjects in English at tertiary level (since 2006 until present) to medical students who were educated in Arabic-medium schools seems to be incompatible with the fact that English is only taught as a foreign language. Students educated in state schools may not be ready to shift from learning English as a FL to English as the language of instruction.

Foreign languages (FLs) are only taught as FL subjects in schools and university curricula. English is the principal foreign language taught in the educational curriculum in the EFL Syrian context. EFL is what Holliday (1994) coins as TESP (tertiary, secondary, and primary) (p.12). It fits within what Kachru (1989, 1992) calls the Expanding Circle where “the performance varieties of the language are used essentially in EFL contexts (i.e., varieties that lack official status and are typically restricted in their uses” (author’s emphasis) (Kachru, 1992: 357).
In 1987, the Ministry of Education introduced the teaching of a foreign language in Grades V &VI (Al- Fakeer, 2000). The rationale behind enhancing foreign language teaching is to cope with the global spread of English, the ‘social and economic evolutions’ and to connect with the ‘outside world’ (ibid: 14). English used to be taught as a compulsory subject in the curriculum from grade V in primary schools until the university level as the primary foreign language. Most Syrian school pupils would choose English as their preferred foreign language. Despite Arab national pride, globalisation has had its impact on the remaining Arab country that has prided itself on its long history of teaching medicine in Arabic. I use the term “internationalisation” instead of globalisation, to refer to “a form of resistance to the cultural homogenisation brought by globalisation and linguistic domination brought about by the spread of English” (Hashimoto, 2007:27). With the spread of English as a result of the social and economic changes embodied in the internationalisation of society and economy and the globalisation of exchanges, Truchot (1997) wrote of the linguistic aspect which paved the way for the supremacy of English over other languages. He noted that:

Very few languages share the market of international linguistic exchanges. To get a share of that market it is necessary for a language to fulfill a number of conditions, that is, an important demographic weight, strong economic support, a previously established international spread, and a high level of
modernisation. Only English fulfills all these conditions... But most languages are more or less excluded from the 'linguistic market' (Truchot, 1997:76).

Harris, Constant & Rampton (2002: 32) echo Appadurai’s (1990) definition of the contested term ‘globalisation’ as ‘a dense and fluid network of global flows’ (Appadurai, 1990, Giddens 1990, Harvey 2000, Kramsch &Thorne, 2002), the consequence of which helped increase capital and human flow as well. Therefore, nation-states are no longer considered self-contained sites with stable populations sharing a common culture (Appadurai, 2005). Globalisation has changed the way we conceptualise language with English as its ‘accompanist’ (Hanson, 1997). It raised issues of how language policy responded to it especially in the case of the English language. According to Wallace (2003:101), “the future of English as a global language seems assured” and will continue to have an effect on foreign language policy and on the institutions and classrooms. Nonetheless, although English is currently dominant, some scholars like Fishman (1998:27) remind that its dominance will “eventually wane in influence”. Fishman notes that

There is no reason to assume that English will always be necessary, as it is today, for technology, higher education, and social mobility, particularly after its regional rivals experience their own growth spurts. Civilisation will not sink into the sea if and when that happens. Ancient Greek, Aramaic, Latin, and Sanskrit – once world languages representing military might, sophistication, commerce, and spirituality – are mere relics in the modern world. The might of English will not long outlive the technical, commercial, and military ascendancy of its Anglo-American power base, particularly if a stronger power arises to challenge it. (p.34)

Similarly, Graddol (1997/2000) speculated in the Future of English that

The next 20 years or so will be a critical time for the English language. The patterns of usage and public attitudes to English that develop during this period will have long-term implications for its future in the world. We may find the hegemony of English replaced by an oligarchy of languages, including Spanish and Chinese. The global popularity of English is in no immediate danger, but it would be foolhardy to imagine that its pre-eminent position as a world language will not be challenged in some world regions and domains of use, as the economic, demographic and political shape of the world is transformed. (p.2)

Previous scholarly studies have been carried out on the spread of English globally; its positive consequences, tensions it created in some contexts; processes and implications (e.g. Strevens, 1980; Kachru,1986; Graddol, 1997; Crystal,1997, Jenkins, 2006; McKay 2002; Holliday, 2005; Kirkpatrick, 2007). Other publications revolved around
the spread of English in relation to concerns of (in)equality, empowerment, marginalisation, linguistic discrimination and imperialism, linguistic hegemony, language rights (e.g. Phillipson, 1992, 2009; Pennycook, 1994; Phillipson & Skutnabb-Kangas, 1996; Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000; Rubdy & Saraceni, 2006; Sharifian, 2009). At present, international has expanded by becoming world Englishes, evolving so as to adapt to the meanings of other cultures. Global English has expanded – has become “global” – by taking over, or being taken over by, the new information technology, which means everything from email and the internet to mass media advertising, news reporting, and all other forms of political and commercial propagandas. (Holliday, 2009:363)

English has “a high status” (Daoud, 1999:3) in Syrian schools and universities. At present, English is taught in Syrian schools from grade I until the end of university studies. In a similar vein, French was recently introduced in Grade VII as the compulsory second foreign language subject in the curriculum. Hence, English and French are currently mandatory subjects in primary education (Ministry of Education, 2011) (Communiqué No. (3/4) 543/ 1986 dated, 31-07-2001 and Communiqué No. (3/4) 543/ 2647/ 2008 dated 14/08/ 2008). Hence, Syrian students in state schools who reach the level baccalaureate will have studied English as a compulsory subject in the curriculum for duration of 12-year learning. At tertiary level, English/French is a compulsory subject in the curricula in all undergraduate and postgraduate studies except in the Department of English where courses are delivered in the medium of English. The emphasis on teaching foreign language could be due to the government’s awareness of ‘education as a channel of upward mobility’ and the continuation of the reform process that the government initiated in 2001 at the educational and economic level ‘to provide trained citizens to meet the economic and political needs of the society’ (Collelo, 1987:37).

The following statements from the Universities Regulation Law 2006 constitute the principles of language policy in the universities:

A- Arabic is the language of instruction in universities with the exception of teaching in the departments of foreign languages and the teaching of foreign languages modules.
B- Only one module in each year of the undergraduate study or two modules in post-graduate studies and the Qualification and Specialisation Diploma and can be taught in the foreign language (mainly English).
C- It is possible that universities establish academic degrees at the qualification and specialisation level and at the postgraduate level in any faculty of a university. This is subject to the decision of the Minister of
Higher Education, after the approval of the Council of Higher Education, on the basis of a scientific cooperation agreement with non-Syrian universities. The medium of instruction in all or some modules will be the foreign language. (Ministry of Higher Education, 2006, Article 20 in Universities Regulation Law 2006).

Although a high demand for ESP is more evident in recent policy documents (SEE 3.3.4), the introduction of ESP in Syria was back in the early 1980s through a five-year project sponsored by the British Council to set up the first ESP centre in Damascus University (1980-1985). Adrian Holliday was among the two KELT (key English language teaching) experts who collaborated with other two Syrian counterparts in the project (Holliday & Cooke, 1982). The project aimed at “developing English language programmes for university students of humanities, science, medicine, and dentistry, employing and developing a cadre of Syrian teachers who would teach the programmes, and training two Syrian ‘counterparts’ to become Directors of the centre after the project had finished” (Holliday, 2005:115-116). KELT experts could not continue working at Syrian universities after the project completion and they had to leave the country due to the ‘sudden severance of political relations between Syria and Britain (1986-1992)” (Daoud, 1999:7). In Tishreen University, the HIL provides similar services the ESP centre in Damascus provides but there is no such an independent ESP centre there (responsibilities of HIL are detailed later in 3.3.4 (11)).

The ESP centre continued to be self-run by local experts and later in 1995, a project Med-Campus Teacher Education Project was launched sponsored by the European Commission to provide training for teachers to qualify them for teaching on the teacher training programs in ESP teaching. This step towards upgrading the status of ESP in Syrian University was targeted towards the establishment of a post-graduate certificate in teaching English for specific purposes (Selle, 1995, cited in Daoud, 1999).

3.3.4 Higher education laws with reference to language policies

National and foreign language policies were part of the process of the extensive educational and economic reform in the country as will be seen in the following list of language policy-related ministry laws. Here, it is worth reiterating key notions of “Arab-nationalism” and “arabisation” mentioned earlier in 3.1.3 which could be interpreted as one main driving force behind the current language policy in the country. I present the
most relevant recent Higher Education Council decisions with regards to language policy in general and to English, in particular, which has gained more importance over the last decade. The analysis of the policy documents was the first step in exploring the ESP situation in Tishreen University. This discourse is oriented towards upgrading English and ESP to a higher level by the increasing demand on teaching it in Higher Education institutions and government job applications while keeping the high national interest in preserving the national language in adherence to a monolithic Arab identity. I present next the language policy documents which are relevant to this study.

1- With regards to foreign language teaching in the university faculties, the following diagram explains it.

**Table 4: The FL teaching hours in year 1&2**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Undergraduate Study Year</th>
<th>FL teaching in the curriculum</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Year 1</td>
<td>2 FL courses for non-specialists (General Skills)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2 terms, 4 hours /week.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 2</td>
<td>2 FL courses for non-specialists (Language for Specific Purposes – LSP)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2 terms, 4 hours /week.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Higher Institutes of Languages (HIL) suggest the textbooks (General or specialised language textbooks) and coordinates and organises the teaching (teacher recruitment, methodology, etc...) of the FL courses in cooperation with the faculty concerned. Each individual faculty selects the appropriate textbook from year 3 onwards (in accordance with the law which states that a core content subject is taught in the foreign language starting from year 3 of the undergraduate study). University councils are in charge of making decisions on approved textbooks (Ministry of Higher Education (MHE decree No.229 /2006, MHE decree No. 257/ 2007). The proposed teaching methodology has been orientated towards ‘communicative language teaching’ (CLT) (Holliday and Cook, 1982), however, studies like Malkani (1992) reported impediments to the
implementation of this methodology due to problematic variables in this context such as the large classes.

2- The Committee of Arabic Language Enhancement ensures that Higher Education institutions abide by the use of standard Arabic in all examination board (Master’s and Doctorate levels) to retain the reputation of universities in the national interest in preserving the national mother tongue language (i.e., Standard Arabic). This law mirrors the country’s ideology of Arab –nationalism and the high emphasis on the national language (Committee of Arabic Language Enhancement letter 317/2008).

3- Rejection of FL exams for postgraduate students in the Faculty of Medicine in languages other than English and French (MHE decree No. 65/ 2009). Although English and French are referred to as equally important, English in Syria has a higher status in Syrian schools, universities, and society.

4- The requirement of FL proficiency in MA and PhD applications. MA and PhD’s applications are conditioned by the English and French languages (MHE decree No.103/2007). Although it is not clearly stated that English is the most common studies language, English is practically is the first foreign language in the country.

5- Specification of English as the FL requirement to gain tenure. (Lower intermediate level, a written test and an interview in the HIL) (MHE decree No.102/2007). Tenuring at university is conditioned upon passing the test and successful interview in English regardless of the first foreign language of the candidate.

6- Scientific research delegations to the Arab Republic of Egypt for the teaching staff in all Arabic departments in Syrian universities and the Sharia’ department in Damascus University only are subject to the submission of an English language certificate, with at least an intermediate level of proficiency (MHE decree No.202/ 2005).

7- All universities should terminate all scientific research delegations of teaching staff who are not competent in either English or French at lower intermediate level. Language proficiency certificates from Higher Institutes of Languages in Universities are required (MHE decree No.375/ 2005).

8- An additional criterion and condition for the appointment of teaching assistants in the universities and higher institutes under the Ministry of Higher Education is a-TOEFL certificate which is credited 5 Points on the total 100-point teaching assistant
competition. The score required is determined separately for each specialisation by a
decree from the Council of Higher Education based on recommendations from the
relevant university councils (MHE decree No.111/2009).

9- TOEFL/ IELTS (English) or TCF (French) certificates are required to register for
MA and Doctorate in state universities (MHE decree 88/2009).

10- National Test of Foreign Languages: (NTFL)

This test is of an enormous value at present, manifests the administrative reform and
aims to develop human resources and upgrade its academic and vocational level. It is
organised by MHE and carried out in HILs. It is legislated by the State Cabinet to better
set definite functional descriptions and develop the performance and skills of candidates
for government jobs. This decision has stimulated students’ interest in learning foreign
languages (Barakat, 2009). Currently, this test (NTFL) is an obligatory requirement for
government job applications. It measures the linguistic abilities that the user of the
foreign language (English / French) needs in varied fields. It tests the general basic
language skills in a multiple-choice test under 4 sections: language use and structure,
reading, vocabulary, and writing. The accredited level is the intermediate (Ministry of

11- Establishment of Higher Institutes of Languages (HILs) in Syrian State Universities
(MHE decree 342/2006). The English Centres take the lion’s share in these institutions
due to the vital role English currently takes in comparison with other foreign language
centres. Their responsibilities include:

• Teach English across all university faculties and institutes.
• Recruit English language teachers at the university.
• Determine general English syllabi in year 1 and ESP syllabi in year 2.
• Organise international conferences of living languages.
• Run language courses for university staff during the academic year and
  summer courses for the children of staff.
• Run language training courses for students on scholarships to the United
  Kingdom from the university or any other ministries.
• Hold workshops for English language teachers in affiliation with the British
  Council. (Teacher training and development)
• Administration of language proficiency tests for MA and PhD applicants, for academic’s tenure, and for government job applicants (NTFL).

To conclude, the above mentioned new language policy issues can be understood as response to the country’s move towards liberalisation and openness to the world by increasing the year of exposure to English regardless whether this is proven to have a positive impact or not. The aforementioned policy change can be an explicit indicator of the upgrade of the status of foreign languages in Syria with a significant sign of English mounting to a higher status through the increasing demand for teaching English for Specific Purposes. In other terms, this could be interpreted as a turn which contradicts or undermines the country’s arabisation policy.

Summary

In this chapter, I gave a historical, ideological, economic, educational, and linguistic account of the local context order to sketch the broader picture after I had introduced the micro description of the research setting in the research methodology Chapter 2. I included an overview of the Syrian higher education system and the position of English as a foreign language in education. I ended the section with sketching the latest language policies of relevance to teaching English and English for specific purposes in higher education which illustrate the increasing interest in teaching English in Syria in the last few years. The information presented in this chapter is hoped to have provided an understanding of the nested language issues against which analysis of the research data will be read in order to understand the effect of these policy changes, mainly the ESP programmes, on medical students’ academic and professional lives. This leads me to analyse my data form other sources to address the EMP research concerns which were identified earlier at Tishreen University.
CHAPTER FOUR: IN SEARCH FOR AN UNDERTANDING OF LEARNING AND TEACHING OF EMP IN TISHREEN UNIVERSITY

4.1 Introduction

Language issues in the Syrian EFL context were presented in the previous chapter alongside an analysis of language policy documents which entail an ideological reference to the country’s national policy. I now move to present the analysis of my findings under the most significant topics that emerged in response to my first aim in this inquiry which is exploring the learning and teaching of English through students’ reflection on present and past learning experiences inside and outside university culture and their imagined future conceptualisation of EMP. ESP teachers’ and medical tutors’ perspectives, including mine, are blended in the analysis of the major emerging topics from student focus groups in order to draw as close picture of the ESP situation as possible in Tishreen University. In other words, the aim of this chapter is to synthesise a platform where the unspoken dialogue is presented based on discourses of students, teachers, medical tutors and myself in an attempt to understand perceptions and speculate their origins and find how they relate to what I described in my professional concern as a ‘conflict’ ESP situation. The chapter is organised under the study’s six main themes which draw on data from all sources.

4.2 Resistance to University English courses

This section sheds light on how medical students resist the English course offered to them by the university and how they independently partake in self-motivated activities outside the university to improve their general and medical English. “Resistance” emerged as a salient issue in the findings which could be a sign of the conflict that exists between students wanting to get through English courses at university and their different purposes of learning English in general. In this section, I try to speculate origins of this resistance as revealed in the data.
4.2.1 Assessment-focused and prioritisation of medical subjects in the curriculum

As long as English is exam-oriented in nature, it loses its value at university because students think of final marks and normally do not remember the subject after they are finished with the test. They think there must be “no marks; only pass or fail assessment” (FG1, GA & GC). This way of thinking impacts on their university life as Rama reported on their spending university time attending lectures and being concerned about the mark for the sake of attaining high total average (FG1, GA, B, C & D).

Students reported this exam concern as “problematic” and mostly driven by the need for achieving high marks to secure a place in the postgraduate and specialisation courses, not to mention the overcrowded, information-dense medical school curriculum and the little time available for students during the academic term to study such a very demanding course (Table 1) Therefore, when occasionally asked by the English teachers about their preference for course content, they would request the teacher to deliver the easiest materials in the English course to save time for the prioritised medical subjects. (FG1 GB, GC). This prioritisation of medical subjects and the exam-mania is tied up with that the final marks which, as noted by Lama,

are the most important factor in medicine which determine what specialisation a medical student will be eligible to apply for. Final year students are only judged by the mark. (Lama, FG1, GB)

Although medical students showed interest in the English language itself, they went on to highlight their primary interest in the total average (total mark) in the English subject. According to them, 99% of the students are concerned about the mark because they view English in the curriculum as a “mark-oriented subject” for the same very reason mentioned earlier. More importantly, they consider it as “secondary because it is non-medical, it doesn’t add anything new to medical students and it is a subject lower than the level of medical students” (FG1, GB). Other students went beyond the mark-focused learning to incorporate what they describe as problematic educational context:

This is the status of education in our country..., the status of English in our university, reinforced through the university and the education system which frames English as secondary and exam-oriented. (FG1, GA)

The Head of the English Centre confirmed that students perceive English in the university as a secondary subject which they study to gain high marks, since they have more important medical subjects to study. She asserted that the Deans of Faculties
sometimes complain to the Higher Institute of Languages about ESP teachers who teach “tough” English content. She explained that “tough” according to the standards of students and faculty officials is the minimum materials an ESP teacher could teach (UMI, 3)

On the other hand, language teachers are reported by my informants to have had contributed to students’ conceptualisation of English the way they do through adopting a teaching model geared towards the final exam mark, “the teacher talks of the important materials required for the exam from the very beginning of the course” (FG, GD ) At the end of each term, private bookshops provide a service of compiling handouts from English courses along with translations so students can only revise for a few days before the final exam. Expressing their blame for teachers for the way English is taught, students noted that:

English language teachers teach us how to pass the exam, not how to learn English, this was very clear in the way they taught us through Arabic literal translation of words and their focus on few texts neglecting others though both are important but one is required in the exam. (FG1 GB)

Liza, an ESP teacher, agrees with students on this by saying that students are used to having English taught “in a traditional way which classifies English as a secondary subject, not important, a mark-oriented course”. She affirms that teachers contribute to this negative attitude towards English in the university when they “teach in the typical way and use Arabic in classroom”. However, she insisted the time for change has come and teachers should be aim for a “proper teaching” of English especially for medical students who need English the most in their studies and professional practice. (Liza, ESP TI).

Final year students addressed this issue differently, stressing that they became aware of the role of English in the lives of medical students in later years of their programme. Final year students reported that they advised freshers to consult these students who would be able to encourage them to improve their English. As they have put it, medical students in the first two years do not know what their needs are in English and have little medical knowledge so the one and only concern is getting high mark (FG1, GD).

This issue is of utmost concern to teachers who seem aware of their students’ way of thinking. Razan remarked:
In the end you have to understand the mentality of the medical student who cares for the mark in the first place. First and last, he cares for the mark as his motivation to learning English at university is the mark.

She described most of her medical students as “good actors” who use this “strategy of pretence incredibly in the Medical School”. Because they are obsessed with final exam results, “they nag a lot and complain that the course materials are dense and they pretend to be stupid so that they guarantee the exam questions will not be hard and eventually get high marks”. She disagrees with students’ perception of English inside university as an assessment-focused subject as she believes medical students will need to read English references and will need to pass TOEFL and IELTS tests for study and work purposes abroad. She complains how 75% of medical student enrol in summer English courses in private language institutions outside the university, but only show interest in gaining high marks in English inside the university. She states that no teacher can change their attitude toward English as an extracurricular burden and exam-focused course (Razan, ESP TI).

Mira, another ESP teacher, describes her students as being “liars” when they intentionally try to deceive the teacher by pretending to have studied very little English previously so the teacher can sympathise with them and re-teach what is considered easy topics such as basic grammar and structure (e.g. tenses) and similar topics they mastered well at school. She attributes this attitude to their deviousness as they are know what is ‘good’ for them at this stage; studying an easy course to guarantee high marks in the final test (Mira, ESP TI).

4.2.2 Mistrust of University English (general and medical) courses

► No-value learning: a pointless experience

Although students appear to have negative views towards English in the university, they do justify the reasons for taking these views by blaming on the university education system and the way English is taught. This may show ambivalence as they would not speak about the flaws of teaching had they not been interested in learning the language per se. Students believe learning English in the university is pointless compared to their school experience. “We were better at school. English at university is poor. We used to have an English class every day, while at university a whole term could pass without realising we had an English course until the day of exam” Mohammad noted. The add-
on (iː ʔafah in Arabic) value at university was little, mainly the specialised medical terminology English level declined (FG1, GA, B, C, D). When Ayman said: “I believe 99% of students agree with me”, the group agreed and added that “the student who attends is not much different from the one who doesn’t” (FG1, GA). In his turn, Rami assumed that “maybe the weak student benefits” and affirmed that “even if there was a difference, it would be very minimal”.

When it comes to attending lectures, students spoke of only a small number who attends to check the register. As they rarely talk, or sometimes never talk in the teacher-centred class and as long the only benefit is learning new vocabulary items, students voluntarily decided to miss those classes. They understand the lecture better when they read the lecture notes on their own. Mai commented: “the lecture time invites you not to attend” (FG1, GD). This issue was recorded in my classroom observational notes wherein students showed they were there physically there to check register; a teacher in one of these classes, “fed up with the carelessness of the students repeated her phrase of ‘I want the quality not the quantity’ and she allowed those students to leave to ensure only serious learners remain in the class” (classroom observation year 1, 2 & 5). Large classes in Syrian Universities seem to contribute to students’ unwillingness to attend the course as a large size class impedes “participation and interaction” in the classroom (FG, GA & C). Lama, added that the teacher, whether it is the language or the subject teacher, is the influential in encouraging students to attend the class or not to attend.

This is true in all our university subjects. The attendance depends on the lecturer. If he is good, i.e delivers the idea in an easy way, and has better teaching methods. This is how attendance is generally. In the English class you have to add that the teacher doesn’t speak everything in English so we can understand what she says. (Lama, FG1, GB)

Teachers were moreover criticised for their accents and their ignorance of speaking and listening skills. (FG1, GA, B, C & D) Generally “when the teacher speaks in Arabic, no student listens to him. So it is very unlikely he will do if the teachers speaks in English”, Ali commented (FG1, GC). The ESP teacher was also referred to as “a spoon feeder” whose primary goal is to transmit knowledge to students undermining any role for interaction in the classroom (FG1, GA).

Another aspect of the reported pointless learning experience is the ESP syllabi which are grammar and vocabulary-focused; not targeted towards what students perceive their needs are. They believe that these textbooks do not help them reach the level that
enables them to “think in the target language” (English). Diverse purposes for learning English are discussed in reference to individual self-motivated learning outside university in section 4.3 (FG1, A, B, C & D).

Students seem to have evaluated the English language teaching at university as “inconsistent” in the sense that they were unsystematically taught various syllabi by various teachers. They view teaching as a “planned continuous process starting from year 1 at university with recruiting a specialized teacher who continues with the same group until graduation” (FG1, GC). Identified by other ESP teachers, Liza stressed that there should be more “consistency” in teaching through “building up on what previous teachers taught” (ESP teacher, TI). Razan also reiterated this inconsistency in teaching and teacher recruitment when she noted:

The same topic may have been covered by teachers a hundred times in earlier years so the teacher is lost and unaware of earlier materials to build upon in order to improve learning (ESP TI).

► Arabisation and translation: ‘Straitjacketing’ medical students

Despite the different inputs from different students’ experiences, there was an agreement on the low value of the English course. However, students also raised concerns about the Arabic medical syllabi. Although evaluation of the Arabic textbooks is not a focus in this research, it emerged as an important factor which is tied up with problematic issues students find in the arabised and translated medical books and which feeds back in students’ preference of English over Arabic medium instruction. The arabised books they study at university lack consistency and clarity due to “loss and distortion of the actual meaning in the process of translation” (FG1, GA & B). Arabisation seems too problematic for students who are not contented with this policy that the country takes. They consider the implementation of this policy to be inadequate as it is preferable to leave the medical terms non-arabised as long as medical research is carried out in America so they invent the words (FG1, GA, B, C & D). Here, we can see a reference to the political climate trajectory on the country’s foreign language policy.

The problem is that Syrians arabise everything. Our policy stresses on arabisation. This policy prioritises Arabic as the primary national language. This policy is political as is the case with any other decisions made by the government. This policy is wrong because the arabised terminology is extremely difficult and no one can understand these words except the Syrian doctors, being the only ones who study medicine in Arabic (FG1, GC).
Students do not trust the university Arabic medical books and they find it hard to read the Arabic terminology. It was revealed that English (primarily American) medical textbooks are easier to read and more preferred by the medical students. The mistrust created by the inefficient literal translation alongside the students perception of the West as the source of up-to-date medical knowledge, are the factors of forming these attitudes towards English in medicine. “Once translated, the information is partially lost that’s why we look up in the original textbook that is English”. University Arabic syllabi, in students’ view who mistrust these books, need to be developed. The problem lies not in the Arabic language but in translation.

Although most students (mainly Group B who had studied one content subject in English) agreed that Arabic would be a better language option in terms of comprehension and more productive in terms of time if only the translation of syllabi was adequately good, they preferred English medical textbooks (FG1, GC). They justified that attitude in that English language was invented for science, the American, not British, textbooks are easier; they explain the information in a very simple straightforward way, they simplify it and put illustrations to help comprehension (FG1, GB).

Some other technical issues reported with the arabised books are the vocabulary used are sourced from the Unified Medical Dictionary (UMD) which are very hard and even incomprehensible to Arabic-speakers; “Arabic words in this dictionary need Arabic-Arabic to decipher their meanings”. Other problems exist in the lack of specialist translators (medical doctors) and the scarce medical research publications in Arabic language (FG1, GB).

►Professional teaching authenticity
The recurrent theme in students’ focus group discussion with regards to the ESP teachers’ qualification to teach the specialised medical English was discussed in teachers’ interviews who expressed their concern about this categorisation and limitation of the ESP roles and capabilities. Respectively, teachers’ interviews were full of references to insecurity, conflict and defensive positioning. Razan, for instance, seems to be very confident about her role as an ESP teacher as she rejects students’ views and perceives that:

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The real problem is when teachers think they are teaching the content subject. This mentality of teachers and students are wrong. I am not there to teach them a subject, I am teaching the language; the English language. Being qualified or not depends on the mentality of the students…I’m not teaching medical subject. (Razan, ESP TI)

What is of importance to medical students when learning medical content in English is the lecturers’ competence to deliver lectures in English. Here, a sense of ignorance is clear in the failure to distinguish between the role of ESP teachers and subject specialists. This is understandable considering that no briefing or rationales for courses are provided to students. With reference to this issue, medical students agree on that fact that “there is no medical doctor tutor who is able to teach in English”. Most are unqualified to teach in English since they are graduates of European countries on Syrian university scholarships (e.g., France and Germany) (FG1, GC).

Ayham F. expressed his concerns with regards to what he perceives “a big problem especially when the subject is meant to be taught in English while the tutor is teaching in the medium of Arabic” (FG1, GA). To get a closer look at this issue, I refer to what informants in group B defined as “an experience of failure”. The course ‘Symptoms and Diagnosis’ in English was a failure because the “subject content itself is hard and there is no medical tutor capable of teaching it well in English” (FG1, GB). Unsatisfied with the teaching of specialised English subject by an ESP/EMP teacher, medical students associate “qualifying” for teaching specialised medical English with “knowledge of medical terminology”.

The one who teaches the specialised English is an English teacher who is not qualified to teach the medical terms. Instead, a medical doctor should teach the specialized English subject. We need a medical specialist to teach the English subject starting from year 3. The English teacher is not good enough to write the exam questions for this specialised subject. The one who teaches us English should know English and Medicine. (FG1, GC)

Similar views were expressed by ESP teachers. As most ESP/EMP teachers in the university are members of staff in the university’s High Institute of Languages, they are in daily contact and some of them teach the general or specialised English courses offered in the institute. Mainly, medical tutors enrol on these courses to improve their English language proficiency and skills. Razan who taught on one of these courses in which “very few” doctors enrol, noted that “medic tutors have no great level of proficiency”.
The medical tutors who teach in the medicine- we are teaching them English. We know their level. Most of them are at the elementary level or if he puts self-effort he is not higher than intermediate or even pre-intermediate. Very rarely you can see one in intermediate. (Razan, ESP TI)

Mira also defended her professionalism and commented that she has not come across “any of the medical tutors who is qualified to teach or to speak in English for an hour”. In a defending attitude to what she perceives as a misconception about the disqualification of the ESP teacher to teach the specialised medical English, she said,

I bet you can find one medical tutor who is good in English; I shall be so much proud of him / her if there is any. If I am not qualified it doesn’t mean that the medical doctor can teach English better than me. (Mira, ESP TI)

Mira, sharing Razan’s views, stressed on the invalidity of defining qualified and non-qualified ESP and on the distinction between being an EMP teacher and being a physician but does not hesitate to show her medical knowledge or competence that made her gain respect of the students and made her ‘qualified’ not like the rest of her peers.

Most of them are not qualified; they lack the needed education. But to me, for me, I trust myself on that and I did gain the respect of my students because they discovered that I do know a lot and my medical education is so much higher and I was able to argue with them about several diseases. They have to keep in mind I am not a physician so I teach English; I teach them how they can analyse a medical text. (Mira, ESP TI)

Although she acknowledged the high profile medical tutors and professors in the Medical Faculty but with regards to English, she stressed that there is “no chance” of meeting “one medical tutor who is qualified to speak English” in a lecture where he/she is supposed to be lecturing about specific scientific issues (Mira, ESP TI).

**ESP teachers’ responses to the issue of professional authenticity**

This leads me to examine ESP teachers’ narrative against the criticism made by medical students about their role and qualification for teaching in the Faculty of Medicine. Their testimonies juxtapose that of students. Teachers explicitly stated their confidence and belief in the multiple roles they take. They also stressed on students’ insufficient abilities to study a core medical subject in the medium of English.
Razan demonstrated that she takes the role of a needs analyst in the sense that she always talks to her students about their needs in the very beginning of every English course. However, she explained that ESP teachers have no role in choosing the ESP textbook, a task of the Higher Institute of Languages which is, in her view, “at the mercy of the major bookshops who monopolise British ESP textbook sales”. She further noted the difficulty of finding an ESP textbook that is good enough to meet all the needs teachers think students have. Similarly, Lama, the Head of English Centre, was aware of what she believes a big problem and of incompatibility of ESP textbooks to students’ needs especially that there is no coordination between faculties and the language institute and that bookstores restrict and determine what students will be taught (UMI, 3).

Razan went on to show how her teaching experience of EMP in state and private Syrian universities has made her build a high profile so she can determine what medical students need English in the ESP courses. More specifically, she noted that she is always in need of cooperation with one of her medical doctor acquaintance to help her with understanding different technical dense medical issues in the supplementary materials she prepares when needed (ESP TI).

Mudar, an ESP teacher, reported that he has always been reflecting on his practice through requesting feedback from students since there is no teacher appraisal provided at the university. According to him, “students always preach what they don’t practise or do”. He commented that he always thinks of himself as a “psychologist and teacher” because the two are interchangeably linked. He is always ready to give students the ‘freedom’ and ‘space’ to discuss issues of concern with him but his calls went unanswered because students are unwilling to learn English.

I am suffering to motivate students; I try hard to change students’ mentality. You can feel how nervous I am now; students are like stones. (Mudar, ESP TI)

While students referred to the English language teachers as incapable of teaching medical English, ESP teachers appeared to have contradictory views about their students’ English proficiency and credibility. Mira narrated instances of the difficulties she had teaching English to medical students:

Students keep saying they are good in English, in no need for English classes but desperate to study medicine in English. I want to make an essential point here; they are completely incapable of learning medicine in English 100%
sure. I do guarantee once they are required to study in English, they will not only complain but will do even more. Teachers should listen to students but students are not always reliable. They are liars. They are not motivated, not interested and they don’t care. Motivating them is painful, was a nightmare because first of all I have to convince them how much English is important to them. (Mira, ESP TI)

Lama, the Head of the English Centre also highlighted the same notion of the “unwillingness of students to learn English inside the university”. English is undoubtedly important to medical students as Julia mentioned but she believes it is too early to introduce students to English-medium instruction as they have not even mastered “the everyday language, writing, listening, speaking, and even thinking in English”.

Of course medical students are distinct from others in other disciplines but, from my own teaching experience, I have never met a student who is able to express himself well in English so I will not expect them to survive English-medium instruction. (Liza, ESP TI)

Interestingly, students themselves expressed their concerns with regards to studying medicine in English, because they think their low English proficiency (due to their perceived poor English input at school and university) does not entitle them to study a specialized subject in English. According to medical students group B, who had studied one medical subject in English, “most of them spent huge effort and time during the term translating from English into Arabic and then memorising for the exam” (FG1, FB). A related point to make here from focus group discussion data is that year 1&2 were unable to read an extract from a medical journal I presented in the discussion. However, students towards the end of the course, year 6 students who have been educated in Arabic-medium schools and university demonstrated a high level of reading skills in a short period of time and were able to discuss the medical journal paper with the group. This example can clearly show that studying medicine in Arabic did not prevent them improving their English reading skills through consulting medical textbooks (FG3, GD).

►EMP course between ‘fantasy’ and ‘reality’

In the last set of focus groups, FG3 discussions and drawings, students were invited to discuss and picture or visualise what they think an EMP course in the university should be like; what are the objectives? What are the roles of teachers and students? How do
they think the classroom setting should be? How is the course assessed? And what is the teaching style? The responses are presented in Figure 12.

![Figure 12: EMP imagined course](image)

I present in this section an analysis of students’ imagined design of EMP courses at university. However imaginary their thoughts were, they were of importance in my study as they were simply not compatible with the EMP courses given. Primarily, English language teachers are not what medical students perceive as the one qualified for teaching English for medical students. This supports their earlier views on what they described as “disqualification of language teachers” to teach the medical English. The objectives of the course as summarised by students reflect the issues of interest to them as medical doctors when learning English.

Firstly; with regards to course objectives, they started developing medical knowledge in English through reading medical research papers, and preparation for communication with the medical community worldwide in English-speaking countries or in international conferences. Secondly; ironically, although they are reported by teachers as passive agents in the English classes, here students imagine their roles as active rather than passive receptors of knowledge; learners who learn the subject through individual research tasks or homework. Thirdly; as they view English as a mark-oriented course; in the imagined course they challenge the traditional assessment and
proposed a variety of assessment types instead of having the one final test (of a total of 100). These include divining the final mark on a written test, quizzes, interviews, presentations, and classroom participation. Fourthly, class size is a common problem in Syrian higher education institutions so the students expressed a concern of many students not only in the Medical Faculty. This issue is not the scope of the research so I will not discuss it in detail. Finally, although they criticised their teachers and complained about them as ESP teachers reported in their interviews, students have their views on what they think the teaching style should be like. It has to be interactive although they were not engaged in the classrooms as classroom observation showed. They imagined an EMP class environment where English-only policy is implemented. This is also contradictory as teachers reported that one of the complaints about teachers was that she spoke English only. Interestingly, they are aware of having individual differences in proficiency level when they proposed having language support sessions which is not common in Syrian universities although they manipulated in classroom to show the teachers they were not good enough so that the teachers would not make any hard exam questions. ICT integrated learning had a share in the imagined course design as it is obvious that the learning materials are not sufficient enough. The concluding key finding of this task data is that the label “imagined” course is exactly imagined in the sense that it is of interest to students but far from the reality of the EMP courses offered by the university.

4.3 Crossing boundaries: English outside university

A paradoxical attitude was observed in students’ preference of the academic culture of “transmission” which is so strong in the institution. Students reported their preference of controlling learning as clear in Kamal’s words,

I had to learn English because my project forced me. I was not aware; you don’t realise the mistake you are making. If one knows what he is eliminating by not learning English, he will know he has to learn it. (FG1, GD).

They called for oppressive learning as a motivation for study. However strange this may sound, students from different groups agreed on it as evident in the next quotes,

Teachers have to force students to learn the English terminology so all will study it by force. We need English. What is happening is that when it comes to university, the subject is no longer exciting; you don’t sense its value. We became like the student who likes his mom to stay with him at home because
she will monitor him and force him to study. Once she goes away he knows he will get distracted from his study. This is the case with English. It has to be imposed on us. They cannot leave it up to us to go home and buy an English textbook to read at the expense of the university Arabic one (FG1, GC).

M: Generally, humans want a monitor to their behaviours and guide them especially us; students. We need someone to guide us as we can’t do learn automatically. We need to be under particular guidance.
J: Again we go back to the idea that the student needs someone to guide him.
M: They have to make the English language compulsory not to leave it for me to go and search for English resources (FG1, GD).

Having illustrated aspects of reality which is produced by ‘power’, I move next to another dimension from which I see power operates in producing the reality presented in data from informants in this study.

Data revealed in section 4.2 that students resisted English inside the university. Nonetheless, though drawing their English language learning journey highlighting the critical moments, it is clear through the analysis of these pictures that students are juggling in the space of “needs” and “purposes” for learning English. In this section, I present an analysis of these drawings and pictures individually in year groups to illustrate the self-motivated learning of English outside university and the multiplicity of “purposes” and “needs” each student places importance on and which could be a sign of how hard it is to determine needs of hundreds of medical students in one classroom in one ESP/EMP textbooks.

Regardless of their proficiency in English or their views on English, they seem to be aware that English is so important in their lives for several reasons which go beyond the university’s narrowed view of teaching English. Learning English journey is limitless and does not end by finishing school and university. Medical students (GD), reported that most of them are regretful of missing out on English in their earlier years of study as when they were half way through the medicine degree, they sensed the need to have studied English medical reference as was agreed by them in the following statement: “when I got in year 4 I had seriously to use English references. I was not aware that I need English unless I wanted to travel to study abroad”. Students whose initial future plan is to pursue postgraduate studies abroad seem to be the most appreciative and mindful of the role English plays as an international language. However, students also reported that their interest in accessing medical knowledge from English textbooks is
not restricted to study-abroad purpose as Sinan said “even if I don’t want to travel abroad I am aware of the importance of English”. In his turn Mohammad, who is to travel to the US after graduation, exemplified how he got to realise the important role of English: “I felt I need because I went to hospitals and dealt with clinical case studies. I became aware that learning English will make me better deal with clinical case studies and will make me think about the important stuff…the medical student has to attend conferences and all the up-to-date lectures are available on the net in English”. More justification for the uses of English textbooks was summarised in their census on what Rama believes in. She claimed that the medical English textbook is “preferable as it benefits us and gives us more information than what the lecture gives us and also gives us answers to something not understood during the lecture” (FG1, GD). English appears to be of high value in their academic and medical lives whether they are staying in the country or travelling abroad. Although anti-English-medium instruction, Ayham insisted that “science must be taught in English”. Mai reiterated how “English is a world language not necessarily for only travelling purposes but because all medical references are written in English, not to mention that English is the language of the internet”. Kamal strongly disagreed with limiting learning English for studying abroad only. Although he referred to that this is what is mostly seen in real life, but he is “against” this view of the purposes for learning English. Also Sinan, who is against English medium instruction perceives this as “the common concept but it is definitely wrong because English is also necessary to cope with science even if you don’t aim to travel abroad”. He said, “even if I don’t want to travel abroad I am aware of the importance of English”. Students in this group (GD) read references in English whether they are planning for study abroad or stay in home country for work (FG1, GD). To disclose more of the motifs for learning and the private activities they took to improve their English, I present next in word picture summaries of what each student marked as critical learning moments on his/her English learning journey from childhood up to the time when data were collected (2010) (24 medical students made drawing and simple writings which were used as supporting data for students’ self-motivated learning of English outside university (see samples in Appendix I).
1) In his chart, Kamal showed how his English improved since he first went to school (1997) until university (year 2) where his level dropped down. Then it gradually improved (2006-2010) as he started enrolling in private ‘English courses’ and read ‘medical books’.

2) Mohammad did not learn English until he went to school in 1996 where he got some skills from school. He received private tuition between 2000-2003. In 2005, he enrolled in courses in the British Consulate (medical English and conversation courses) and had private tuition one day each week. In 2006, he carried on with the private tuition and enrolled in courses at the X private language centre. In 2007, he was with a private English teacher too and in the summer of that year he travelled to the USA and studied an English course there. In 2008, he started studying medical book in English and in 2009 he started studying with friends in the English language.


4) Rama started learning English at school in 1995. In 1998-2003, she used to watch programmes on TV and sang its songs. She once sang one song in English in front of her teacher and classmates and the teacher awarded her some flower and a game as a souvenir for mastering English. He also gave her poems and books to read. He also used to give her English songs to learn. In 2004, she went to university where she learnt Latin words in the first year in the English class. Then she learnt English at university only for the rest of the study years.

5) Ayham learnt English at school in the 5th grade in 1996. He moved to preparatory school in 1998 and the level of the course syllabus got higher. He entered the School of Medicine in 2004 when he started to realise the importance of English. In 2005, he started reading the first specialist medical book in English. In 2006, he enrolled in a conversation course to improve his English and in 2008 he travelled to Germany for 15 days where he used the English language.

6) Alongside the English courses in school, Sinan took English courses in an English language institution in 1994 then he privately learnt English from 1996-2003. He interrupted from 2004-2006 to focus on his studies. From 2007-2010, he studied medicine in English and became more fluent using English in medicine. He had self-esteem of becoming a better learner.
Medical students (GC) seem to agree on that that they took English courses (outside school and university) as a self-effort.is a self-effort. Mohammad, although he was not officially engaged in private English learning, he improved his English in his own way as he believes there should be some compulsion to push them to learn: “there should be something that makes us work…not everyone has got the awareness and knowledge of one’s interest” (learn in this context). Independent learning is also evidenced in their reference to the English class at university as being easy for them to read on their own at their own time. In line with medical students (GD), they referred to the community of practice here in the university by the following message received from other colleagues in the school, “our seniors warned us (notified) to learn English. Actually, we forget that we have an English subject at university”. There seems to be an agreement on that the bright side of English learning experience in the university was only seen in the (self-directed, autonomy) self-motivated activities by students who were keen on improving the English language privately and independently by varied way amongst which was reading English medical textbooks; “the only one positive thing lies in those students who improve themselves on their own by extended reading of English references regardless of what is being taught in the English class” (FG1, GC).

This view in a way or another could be interpreted as based on their belief of their “need” for English in all walks of medicine profession and ordinary modern life; to develop the doctor’s character in clinic and hospital (FG1, GC). Some motifs and independent learning examples are presented next.


2) Yasser only relied on school (primary) courses (1998-2000) as ‘teachers were very good for a junior’. He took course in summer holidays (2000-2005), then he ‘started
3) Jack started learning English in the 5th grade and relied on English given at school until 2003. In 2004, he enrolled in a private English course that was good in vocabulary but weak in conversation. In 2005, his individual activities increased to improve his English through a variety of way such as songs, movies, internet, etc. He suspended the activities for the year 2006 for the baccalaureate at university personal efforts are back.

4) Maher started learning in the 5th grade in school in 1997 and enrolled in one English private course in 1998. During school years until 2005 (baccalaureate), he relied on English given school that went in parallel with ‘watching English series’. After baccalaureate, he continued ‘watching a lot of movies’ when English given at university was ‘weak and no use’. In 2009 & 2010 (until now).

5) Malek started learning English in the 5th grade and learnt much more about grammar and new words in school. At university, he started listening to English songs (1st year), he participated for the first time to an institute (2nd year), he started to forget what he had learnt (3rd year).

6) John started a private English course in primary school (4th grade) in 1998, and then he took summer courses (2001-2003). He interrupted in the baccalaureate year and took only grammar focused extra lessons. At university (2007) he ‘started reading medical subjects in English’. By 2009, he became ‘very good in medical English’. Now, in 2010, he thinks he needs to improve ‘his speaking and listening skills’.

Figure 14: Year 4&5 journeys in ‘word pictures’

Medical students (GB) also independently worked on their English from earlier years as stated: ‘I worked hard (myself) to improve my language and later I started to find learning the foreign language (English) easy’. Only Dina said “I worked on my own and found out that self-studying is hard” so learning on her own was not as easy as the others found it. Mustafa, was firstly hooked in language English language learning when he enrolled in a course where he studied “a British textbook that made me like the language “Kernel”. Most of them used to use English in school times to ‘chat and watch
TV’ but due to lack of a good internet connection, not all were using English for internet purposes. Dina, for example said: ‘in school time, I did not have an internet connection but I used to enrol in English courses to improve my language in the summer vacation’. Mustafa used to get ‘scripts of movies and started learning the idioms to improve my language’. All of them became more interested in learning English after baccalaureate and enrolled in private language institutions in order to be able to read references and textbooks in English’. By year 3, they have got used to reading English references to improve themselves. They reflected on advice given by medical tutors in the faculty to read English medical textbooks independently; “all medical tutors recommend and urge us to be independent and self-study English references and to improve our English”. Mustafa believes learning requires self-studying and English is an important language and medicine requires “self-effort”. As other medical students, these group members have some perceptions that gear their drive towards mastering English such as travelling abroad for work and study purposes. English is the global language and the language of medical articles and journals anywhere in this world. Mustafa commented that a doctor would need English even if “he goes to China”. They bring in examples for the requirement of English when “one wants to go to the Arabian Gulf countries he needs English and if he wants to pursue his specialisation he needs English’. Dina couldn’t agree more when she said: “this is the primary condition; the language”. For academic and professional purposes, they feel motivated to learn English because conferences are hold in English even if the doctor understands Arabic he has to present in English and references are all in English so they have to read in English to understand the information (FG1, B).

1) Fadi’s first critical moment he drew is that he was born in the USA where he ‘learned to speak English’. He moved to Syria (1995-1996) and learned ‘only spelling’ until he took private tuition at home in 1997 until 2000. He visited the USA in 2000 and did so ‘over each summer ‘since then. He went to school in the USA for a month in 2001 too. From 2001 he started to ‘read books and words; until 2008 when he ‘started studying medicine in English’.

2) Mustafa’s first ‘contact with English was in pre-school, he learnt the alphabet, numbers, and some sentences (1992-1995). When he went to elementary school, he ‘forgot everything he’d learnt’. Then he started to learn English at the 5\textsuperscript{th} grade (1999). In the summer of 2000, he studied a course called ‘Kernel’ that goes back to the 80’s, but his teachers ‘was some kind of an old-fashioned guy’. Then
he went to an English lab called ‘Motive’. There, he started to realise that English is ‘a pretty nice language’. He took several classes there. Then he went to college. He was ‘prepared to be able to use English as a general language’ but the medical language was something different’. First, he had ‘many difficulties in reading medical books but slowly, he could manage to read them and now he can read any medical book easily’.

3) Lama started her learning journey ‘wondering about English’ in 1999 and started watching ‘translated documentaries while taking ‘English courses’. After learning English in school she started 2005 (school time), she watched ‘Hollywood movies such as Titanic, The Lord of the Rings...etc

4) In the fifth grade, Amir started learning English at school. In the 10th grade he had a teacher who tried just to use English during the English class and motivated them to improve their English. After 12th grade he started to work on his own language and tried to improve it with the internet. In the university, using the English resources for his study was a new level in learning English.
Dina narrated her journey as follows: “in elementary school, the road was bumpy because the syllabus was very weak and doesn’t benefit the students. At this stage I hated English. In the preparatory school the road started to widen because the teacher are university graduates not college ones as those who teach in preparatory school. I started to understand how to learn English and enrolled in private institutions to improve it. In secondary school, the road became very developed as I studied in the Mutafawiqeen School which focused on English and allocated enriching classes from outside the syllabus. At university, year 1, the road became so narrow and tough again because we didn’t deal with English for one full year. In year 2 and 3, I started improving my English by myself, my self-effort”.

Figure 15: Year 3 journeys in ‘word pictures’

In an emphasis on students’ agency in learning, distinguishably, medical students (GA) stressed the issue of self-motivated English learning which is segregated from university education. Hence they reiterated their anti-English medium attitude which was discussed earlier in this chapter. This is revealed in their following quote:

The student works on his own…teaching medicine should continue to be in Arabic because it is easier and because we live in Syria and we will settle in here. We can improve our English on our own. In the end, you can’t impose it on someone to improve his/her English if he/she has got no motif. This is a self-effort activity. (FG1, GA)

They also seem to have taken private English courses or worked on their English in various ways. Ayman took private English courses that apparently ‘had the greatest influence on improving my language’. They ‘didn’t rely on school’. Ayman for example, ‘benefitted from movies, songs, series and the internet etc., especially for conversation’, Ihab “relied 30% on school and 70% on the rest”, and Moataz “benefitted mostly from movies”. Only Rami believes “the school is important and the rest is complementary”. Most students in this group seem to be motivated to learn English for after graduation. Rami and Ayman think it is beneficial now and in the future but they agreed with the group that “we think of improving ourselves for after graduation”. They seem to be aware that English is important or will be useful at some stage and that is the reason that they study English inside the university as they need “to be forced to learn it”. This stance is summed up in their following statement:

At present, English doesn’t benefit us but for future it does’ as ‘we, rarely, have to speak in English to anyone. There are no activities with foreign countries in Tishreen universities and if it ever exists it will be very limited.
We don’t use English in our university. Conferences are held after graduation once we practice our profession (FG1, GA).

More examples of their independent English learning activities are presented next that shows the lack of the same awareness that other medical students in more advanced years have with regards to the academic and professional use of English. They are at the periphery of medical community and the road is not as clear as for others who already mastered English that brought them forward closer to the centre of the wider medical community.

1) Ihab, 1st year medical student describes his journey in his map drawing where he first learnt the English alphabet and used English dictionaries to increase his vocab repertoire in his pre-school (1995-1996), moved to a state primary school where in he learned the English language basics and grammar while watching series and listening to songs in English on TV extra lessons (all skills) (2001). In the private preparatory school, he describes the English courses as ‘developed’ (2002). From 2003-2008 while in the Top Student School (Mutafawiqeen school), he described the English courses there as ‘good’ since students in this school have extra supplementary English course. Once he got into university (Tishreen University) he started learning the General English course offered in year 1 for medic students.

2) Ahmad’s journey map is rather simplistic and shows he had started learning English only in the state primary school and watched movies in English before moving to public secondary school (Mutafawiqeen School mentioned above). At the crossroad to university, there are signs of ‘few private English course’ alongside watching movie. Getting at university, he summarises his learning as ‘nothing important’ and ‘a very few information from university’. The next step is unknown as could be evidenced from the big question mark at the top end of the road map.

3) From kindergarten to primary school, Ayham F. appears to have mostly learnt English at school. However, what he highlighted a critical moments in his journey are his interest in the English football team Arsenal and his reference to following updates on ‘the club’ official website’ that is in the English language. At the same time, he seems to have at times read his ‘dad’s books &dictionaries’. He referred earlier in one of the focus group discussions that he is influenced by his father who is a teacher of English. At the roundabout to university, he seems in confusion, unsure of what is next a clear in his concluding phrase ‘I

4) Rami started learning letters and numbers in English through his mum before KG (1996) where he learnt some words. From kindergarten until the 5th grade in school (2003) he learnt ‘nothing really new’. In the preparatory school the input was ‘grammar’ from school and ‘conversation’ practice from the ‘extra lessons’ he took. In the 9th grade, he took extra supporting English lessons.
secondary school (2009), again grammar was the basis and a bit of conversation with alongside watching films and listening to songs in English. In his first year at university (2009), he ‘didn’t do anything’ and ‘now planning for the future’ which is marked by several question marks.

5) Moataz did not take any English courses outside state school and university education and he used to watch English movies at the crossroad onto university.

6) Ayman started learning English in (2000), 1 year before primary school (2001). His map is clearly divided into two parallel roads, one is the state school and university English and the second is the private tuition in a private language institution (2001-2008). He interrupted for a year for his international baccalaureate and then moved to university where he only studied the English offered in the Medical School.

Figure 16: Year 1&2 journeys in ‘word pictures’

4.4 Voices in the head: conflict, confusion, and uncertainty: Contested views about the role of English

Voices, where to begin.
Less is more, show, don’t tell.
(Denzin, 2009: 205)

In order to understand the source of conflict, I collected data on students attitudes; feelings which are, as Crystal (1997) defines, “natural, and would arise whichever language emerged as a global language … give rise to fears…and fears lead to conflict” (p. 2). In this respect, feelings are explored in this study as attitudes about English which Kachru (2006:512) theorised as being a form of “unplanned” or “invisible” policy which is contrary to the one espoused by the state and more powerful since it springs from attitudes in the society of parents toward the dominant language, opinion-makers in the media, peers, etc. (p.519).

Through listening to students’ learning experience, an aspect of contest in the students’ views was evident in the conflict, confusion and uncertainty when voicing their views of
English and its role in their life as academic medical students at Tishreen University. Medium of instruction stands out as a major topic of concern in the data, ‘the talk of town’ due to the fact that only Syrian medical students have experienced a long history of learning medicine in Arabic. To reiterate one key point from the foreign language policy documents, Syrian universities are Arabic-medium and are very unlikely to shift to English as a medium of instruction as in some Arab countries. In this section, I shall present three views or voices on medium of instruction with reference to direct quotes from students’ focus groups, teachers’ and medical tutors’ interviews, and hospital observations.

4.4.1 Listening to the “in favour of English” voice.

Students showed a strong preference for English alongside sentiments for Arabic. Medical students seemed to share strong congruent views in favour of studying medicine in English. As the world is changing and becoming more aware of the role English plays in the globalised world, students unquestionably take for granted that “English will replace Arabic at some point” (FG1, GD) and they expressed their wish to gradually come true in due course. The reason for this strong belief is that they can currently see this represented in the new university policy that requires medical doctors to pass an English proficiency test. They also stressed that they need to master English “to hold in-house conferences and go public worldwide presenting and introducing Arab doctors to the world (FG1, GD).

The preference of English by students does not mean that they dismiss Arabic which is the highly valued mother tongue. Students expressed an embedded certainty and a “deep-rooted belief in the necessity for the preservation of Arabic by all means”. The following excerpt in support for English as medium of instruction in the Medical Faculty is illustrative of this issue wherein students argue for ‘why’, in their views, Arabic is internalised and well-shielded and therefore preserved from any threat of any other foreign language.

We (students) speak Arabic so Arabic won’t be affected. In Iran and Turkey we are teaching Arabic and Arabic is the language of religion so there is no threat to Arabic language. (FG1, GD)
Students’ belief that Arabic will never be threatened if students are instructed is due to the fact that Arabic is tied up with the Qur’an and Islam, the monotheistic religion articulated by the Holy Qur’an (scripture of God’s verbatim words) which was revealed in the original Arabic language in the Arabian Peninsula. Muslims consider all translated versions of the Holy Scripture as mere interpretations that do not replace the Qur’an in theological and legislative terms. The Qur’an has also a linguistic value as the first book composed in Arabic and is also regarded as in the finest piece of literature work in the Arabic language. Religion and language are intertwined in this sense and as long as the Qur’an was revealed in the Arabic language, most Muslim non Arabic speaking countries will promote the learning of the Arabic language. In one of my hospital observations, surprisingly, I met visiting Iranian medical doctors who communicated with the Syrian medic graduates in Arabic not English. In agreement with the above, as well as holding the belief that Arabic is being taught to non-Arabic speaking countries for Islamic purposes, there was a constant reassurance by students that “Arabic is the language of the antecedents and Syrians are loyal to their heritage and culture” and Syrian Arabs “will not forget their origin and roots” (FG1, GD).

Nationalism and the sense of pride is another powerful factor in the emphasis on Arabic language preservation. Language symbolises heritage and Arabic is essential when defining the Syrian Arab nationality. For Syrians, as the first alphabet was founded in Ugarit in Syria, languages and Arabic in particular are deep-rooted as the language of ancestors and the language that unites the Arab Nation. The discussion continues and reaches a consensus that having English as the medium of instruction in higher education is not what makes Arabic vulnerable to loss or death.

As long as people are connected with religion this way here and Quran is written in Arabic, don’t worry about the future of Arabic. Arabic is taught in Iran and Turkey and wherever you go you find people learning Arabic. (FG1, GD)

In another linguistic line, medical students, scientifically-minded, expressed their view of language learning. According to them, language acquisition does not require more than 18 years; the age where Syrian students complete high school and apply for universities. Therefore, Arabic is not threatened as long as it is in everyday use in the Syrian local social network at home with family, and with colleagues at university or work. This is emphasised in the following statement.
The problem is not in medicine which will make us forget Arabic; there are more other things that do. We learn Arabic for 12 years in school and we have our society, family, background so our Arabic language will not be affected if we study in English only at university in our department. (FG1, GD)

Before justifying the need for English in medicine, students mentioned examples where they would “need” Arabic in the medicine context. For students who advocate studying medicine in English, Arabic is perceived as equally important for the reasons summarised in the following excerpts; mainly because doctors in Syria do not use technicalities when practising medicine with patients.

We should learn medicine in Arabic too because we have to know the words to deal with Arab patients in Arab hospitals. The patient is not interested in knowing his disease. He will not understand its origin anyway. The doctor should use a simple way to explain to the patient so he can understand. He, for sure, is not going to use the term from the unified medical dictionary2. Certainly, we will not explain in a scientific medical language. (FG1, GB)

While, fully aware of what Arabic represents to the Syrian Arab doctor, a parallel awareness seems to have been raised to the role of English in the globalised era. This could reflect the impact of globalisation of medicine and English on medical students’ life. It sounds as if options are not many and regretfully students are driven by the forces of globalisation as embedded in the following quote:

We need Arabic but English is also necessary. It is sad to abandon Arabic but there is no alternative. This is one negative consequence of globalisation but we also are certainly not abandoning it completely”, said Amir. We shouldn’t abandon Arabic for any reason but at the same time we have to be good in English. (FG1, GB)

The common sense is that the Arab patient is not interested in knowing the mechanics of the disease which students study in English (Mustafa, FG, GA). In their views, there is no need for learning the Arabic “technical” medical words because they are not part

2 The Unified Medical Dictionary (UMD) is a Multilingual Medical Dictionary, which was originally compiled in the late 1960s and early 1970s on response to a recommendation of the Arab Medical Union. Subsequently, two further editions were issued, the last of which (UMD third edition, 1983) included French terms.
of the shared professional language with other medical students in private English medium universities and other doctors in the Arab world. Their avidity to learn English does not seem to influence their awareness of their need of Arabic in medicine as, they mentioned repeatedly that their patients are Syrian Arab and they still need “to communicate with them in a rather adequate way explaining the diagnosis and medication in a rather simplified medical way” (FG1, GC). In the era of globalisation, students expressed, they “have no other choice but to “abandon” Arabic in the medical context at the local, regional and international level”. They acknowledge it as “one negative consequence of globalisation” but positively adopting it to become members of the world community (FG1, GB).

Other reasons students reported to have influenced their preference of English over Arabic are that a) while English is more expressive than Arabic when used in the scientific or medical context, Arabic is more expressive in the literature and literary studies, b) translation of the current Arabic university medical textbooks is inefficient. They seem to mistrust the Arabic university textbooks because of “the bad literal translation” and this could be a significant factor in pushing them towards the use of the English medical source texts (FG1, GC). For example Dina explicitly stated that:

Had these books been literal correct translations, I wouldn’t have studied English textbooks except to improve my speaking skills and the basic essential technical words to use in conferences (FG1, GB).

Medical English is easier than Arabic and the real problem does not lie in the Arabic language. Rather, it is the fact that medical English is up-to-date. Therefore, students confirmed the need to “update medical Arabic to meet the requirement of the present era as the medical words used at the time of Ibn Sina do not work in this globalised era”. The reference here is to the inappropriateness of the use of old medical terms, which were commonly used in the Middle Ages, in the present era (Lama, FG1, GB).

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3 Ibn Sina (980-1037 C.E) was a Persian polymath. His best-known contributions to medicine is amongst them, his 14-volume *The Canon of Medicine* (Al-Qanoon fi al-Tibb, The Laws of Medicine), which was a standard medical text in Europe and the Islamic world up until the 18th century.
Year 3 medical students had studied one content subject in English so I will present their views in this section on the learning experience of the piloted medical subject in the medium of English. According to them, the piloted subject “Symptoms and Diagnosis” was a hard one regardless of the language in which it was instructed. Fadistated that it was easier to study it in English; however he experienced impediments to comprehension of medical information. Dina shared the same opinion as the subject “Symptoms and Diagnosis” requires much more memorisation than understanding. This experience is reported as a failure because of the university’s wrong subject choice and the failure to attend to the unreadiness of students for English-medium instruction.

It was not a good plan and the choice of the hardest subject to be taught in English happened at the time when the student is not ready yet to study a medical subject purely in English. Students’ proficiency level is not high because what they learnt in school and year 1&2 at university not enough to entitle them to study one specialised subject in English. Thus, the student spends most of his time translating from English into Arabic to comprehend the information. (FG1, GB)

However, although it was a failure experience for the majority of the medical students, Mustafa proudly excluded himself and attributed failure to students’ low English proficiency and their unreadiness to study core subjects in English, Fadi took the same stance and both were mindful of the need for having academic language support to other peers whose English proficiency is low (FG1, GB). Thus, studying medicine in English, to this informants group, is feasible especially that they view themselves the “elite” students who study a high-stakes major (medicine) in a state Syrian university which normally conditions entry to the Medical Faculty upon achieving nearly full grades in the baccalaureate/high school (FG1, GB).

With regards to assessing students’ level in English, I can only speculate that year 1&2 medical students found it hard to read a medical article I gave out to them to skim through in our 3rd focus group meeting. It took them longer time than it took other students in later advanced years. Apparently, as most of them independently read English references, they got more capable of reading a medical text in a shorter period of time (independent learning was shown earlier in their learning journey maps)). Despite their good reading comprehension, they were unable to converse in English and they refused to have the FG discussions in English as they admit they are good in medical terminology but are not used to use the language in medical contexts.
I now present in this section the views of the ESP teachers and medical lecturers who also were in favour of English medium instruction in medicine. ESP teachers also had their own views on English that directly support teaching medicine in English. Mira, for instance, thinks that “the worst mistake ever is teaching medicine in Arabic”. She strongly appreciates the Arabic language to which no other language is “equal” or “similar”. Although she distinctively describes Arabic as the “a very beautiful essential language of senses”, she was keen on stressing that students ‘must study medicine in English because it is the easiest and most feasible and the result will be tangible”. She perceives that English has an essential role in the world. She said:

If you want to deny that English language actually became a global language you are in serious denial you have a very serious condition so English became essential. (Mira, ESP TI)

Another ESP teacher also prided herself with the unique experience of teaching medicine in Arabic but she described this as being the “non-reality”. The reality, in her opinion, is that medical students in Arabic-medium universities exert a double effort during their university course to read medical texts in English, the language they will need later in their academic and professional lives. “We can teach in English; why not? This is a global world” (Nancy, ESP TI). Razan also asserted the vital role English takes in the lives of medical students. She believes that, in particular, medical students and medical doctors have a golden opportunity to

deal with the majority of people worldwide as they may have foreign patients; most of our doctors think of going to study or work abroad and a very little number stay in here, and even those who practise at home have already built a good basis in English.

Hence, the role of English seems to be associated with the extent it represents a “need” as Razan mentioned a couple of situations where doctors, in her opinion, will need English for such as “when they want to go to the Gulf they are asked for English and when they want to deepen their specialisation outside they need English” (Razan, ESP TI). This means that English is regarded as “useful” for working in foreign countries.

The last group in favour of English-medium instruction in medicine is the medical lecturers, who are graduates of UK universities, practice as consultant in the UK and who currently teach in Tishreen University were highly in favour of English and expressed their constant encouragement of students to study medicine in English as they
speculate that “medicine will be taught in the medium of English in 25year-time as it should have always been”. However, they reported the impediment to the implementation of this policy which is that “unfortunately all medical lecturers are graduates from Syria or European countries who are not fluent enough in English to teach a content subject purely in English” (Abdulla & George, MPIs). A third tutor commented in favour of English too:

We were exporters of science but now actually we are consumers. We may be exporters but not from our country. If we are doing research now in Syria, we will publish in Arabic but the opportunities outside are more. (Abeer, MPI)

4.4.2 Listening to the ‘in favour of Arabic’ voice

I begin with a quote by a postgraduate medical student, Noura who is in favour of Arabic-medium instruction while she is keen on improving her medical English.

I am against as a Syrian Arab to graduate from Medical School not knowing the name of the disease in Arabic, it is a shame. I have to know English that enables me to read medical journal and understand the latest update in medicine. My medical English is good I look to develop my English but the primary language is Arabic. (Noura, PSI)

Year 1 & 2 students (GA) were the key advocate of Arabic-medium instruction in the Medical Faculty. They are the only informants in this study who had not yet used English in their academic studies. They described private universities as taking an “exaggerating” policy in teaching all medical subjects in English. Ayham F, for instance is against teaching medicine solely in English as he believes that “no matter how good I am in English, I will certainly benefit more if I receive the knowledge in my own language” (FG1, GA).

This group favours Arabic because it is “easier to receive knowledge” in one’s native language. In principle, studying medicine in Arabic incorporates learning English medical terminology which is provided in the index of each Arabic university textbook. One crucial issue would remain when discussing possibilities of teaching medicine in English which is the lack of medic tutors who are capable of teaching in English bearing in mind most are graduates from France or Germany. Another problematic issue with studying medicine in English, as perceived by students, is that the student leaves school with knowledge of general English not medical English. Students seem to be aware of
the need for a more English input in school if English is set to be the medium of instruction in the university. Ayham F, a year 2 student, called upon policy makers and senior officials in the university that “they should rethink their plan and start teaching English in a more efficient way from school times” (Ayham F, FG1, GA). All the group seem to agree that an essential part of medicine is communication and most graduates will practice medicine in Syria so Arabic is a primary language to communicate with patients. This is represented in their mindfulness of the Syrian Arab patient who “feels better when he’s clearly introduced to his disease and treatment methods”. For those students interested in the English language, (GA) suggested that they “could privately work on that but medicine should continue to be taught in Arabic, the language they live and practise medicine in” (FG1, GA). The so-called ‘self-effort’ seems to be taken as “norms” as most student participants in this research clearly demonstrated their self-motivated learning of English as previously illustrated in their learning maps in 4.3.

4.4.3 Listening to an ‘undetermined’ third voice

In an Arabic medium context where it is the norm to study medicine in Arabic, students seem to be rebelling against this situation. They appear to be unsatisfied with Arabic-only instruction. Whether they are being realistic in their ambitions or not, a number of medical students from different year groups expressed their aspirations to be good speakers of both Arabic and English. This opinion could be seen as ironic since the mother tongue is not a language that one aspires to master; it is meant to be naturally acquired in the Arab monolingual country. This indicates how students are not confident enough to voice their preference of English medium because of the social, national, religious, and cultural connotations that hold to Arabic.

English is essentially needed in science and medicine but Arabic is the language we use with family, in school and hospital, the language of our religion…etc (FG1, GD).

Final year students (GD) who reported that they have been studying medical texts in English independently during their programme of study, were in favour of “learning two languages simultaneously but not to dismiss Arabic” as they believe in the ability to preserve two languages where they learn English with its Arabic definition. A high appraisal of the Lebanese experience was expressed among students who aspire to
follow the Lebanese foreign language policy of enhancing French and English languages alongside the mother tongue. This group highlighted the value of English and at the same time mentions Arabic as the language of communication with their Syrian Arab patient citizens. According to them, “the patient is not like in old times. He is more demanding and asks for clarification on his medical condition in simplified Arabic” (FG1, GD).

As a medical student who had studied one core medical subject in English, year 3 students insisted on the importance of the mother tongue without eliminating the value of the world English language. They stressed on that English and Arabic must be studied in parallel. For instance, Dina said:

I prefer to study medicine in Arabic at university but I must study in English too; that is we should not ignore either of these two languages...We should not forget our national language. It is ok if we are taught few, not all, medical subjects in English (FG1, GB).

Lama, although strict in her views that “there is no comparison between the mother tongue and the intruder language”, she proposed what she called “the best ideal solution” where lectures are delivered in both Arabic and English regardless of the language used in the final assessment. The language of assessment is a very significant issue here as students are assessment-focused and the major concern is attaining a high mark in the exams. Nonetheless, being assessed in English would be problematic for them due to the reported low level of English proficiency (FG1, GB).

Final year students wished they could study medicine in both languages taking in consideration the “deficiency of Arabic in certain fields” (FG1, GD) As much as learning in the mother tongue is the important, it is mostly important to have reliable authentic texts. Students do not trust the Arabic medical texts in-use in the university due to their literal translation from the English sources and lack of writing professionalism (FG1, GD). The flaws of translation have been reported earlier in 4.2.2.

The 6 postgraduate medical students I interviewed while conducting the hospital observations suggested teaching one or two medical subjects in English or at least the medical terms. All claimed they are very good English users as they studied English on their own (i.e., private tuition and consulting English medical texts for their university subjects) and they supported studying in English which is more straightforward than Arabic in medicine but without dismissing Arabic. Not so different from their medical
colleagues in early study years, the postgraduate medical students placed importance on using both languages (Arabic & English) but for different purpose- to communicate with patients and keep up-to-date; respectively. According to them,

the one downside is that they studied medicine in Arabic and thus as they are good doctors, they have to master both languages and be responsible because they are required to read English references. (HO, 2)

As evidenced in observations, and as expressed by students, English has an important role in their life whether at the academic or professional level. According to students, they studied general English at school and they only need the medical terminology to survive in the medicine field. English is barely used in hospital and is limited to reading medical references, if needed, in their professional practice in hospital. (HO, 1)

Although doctors speak Arabic, communication is in Arabic, and patient files are written in Arabic, there are cases when English is used in communication when doctors who have studied in the English-medium private universities join them on a work visit. Also, English is sometimes used when speaking to specialists, discussing a medical case published on the web, or intentionally when aiming to hide diagnosis from patients, and finally when they are urged to read hospital manuals of medical equipment due to the technicians’ poor English. Not to mention that prescriptions and the scientific and commercial drug names are written in English (HO, 1). While spoken English does not seem to be used so much, there were instances, in my presence, when medical students checked online resources in English and other English e-medical textbooks and articles while they were in practice. Iranian practitioners I met during the observation in the Dermatology Clinic at Al Assad Hospital spoke in Arabic and used Arabic medical terminology (e.g. the transliterated /Sheeri/ for one type of skin disease) although both Iranian and Syrian doctors claimed they can speak English but Arabic is easier and more preferable (HO, 3).

In my 4th hospital observation, I attended what is called a ‘Postgraduate Journal Day’ which they have once a week and in which postgraduate students present a medical patient case to colleagues and tutors. One student gave his presentation in Arabic and presented the paper in English PPT format. Even though he used English medical terms, it was impossible for him speak in English as students have never delivered presentations in English in the university. In a follow up talk with him, he expressed that he was confident enough presenting the medical case in Arabic. The case study he discussed was originally written in English but he used Babylon and other online
dictionaries to get the translation done. In his view, by practice, translating has become an easy task for him especially because his medical terminology repertoire has increased largely in recent years of reading English references. In the presentation, he mentioned one term in English which he did not know how to translate into Arabic and only one student among tutors and postgraduate students had the answer for the Arabic equivalent of the term Oxycodone. This indicates that, if students and doctors happen to be familiar with the English medical terms, this does not necessarily mean they know their Arabic translation

Students’ perspective was similar to what Abeer, a medical doctor tutoring in the Medical Faculty, seemed highly concerned about. She was educated in the medium of Arabic and currently lecturing in a private English-medium university in Syria. She is not against Arabic as the medium of instruction but referred to the high value of English in doctors’ lives today in consulting medical research updates that are published in English. She takes private English classes so she does not “feel much behind others”.

Our problem is that we studied medicine in Arabic. I’ve taught medicine for 20 years and only this year I focusing on English medical terms so at least our students can use the internet. You cannot wait for recent medical research to get translated into Arabic; there is new research everyday. I always download new research articles in English. I am obliged to learn English to be up-to-date with recent publications in case one of my students asks about anything in English, I need to know English to answer him/her.  

(Abeer, MPI)

In this extract, Abeer indicates that although she delivers her lectures in Arabic she uses English medical terminologies alongside the Arabic ones. Although she acknowledges her intermediate proficiency of English, she feels more comfortable using the English terms and so do her students.

I was shocked in my professional life. I didn’t know before that I will need English since my patients are Arabs. Nowadays, I carry my Atlas with me all the time as I am teaching in Al Andalus private university. Doctors have to be good in both languages. Maybe if I am good in English I would prefer to study in English. I will not feel a stranger in this world. I use Atlas all time to read new research in English. I don’t want my students to suffer as much as I did. (Abeer, MPI)

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4 Atlas is an English-Arabic translator and dictionary.
Talking about Arabic and arabisation, she expressed concerns of “disconnection from our mother tongue”. She is not against arabisisation but strongly advocates “teaching part of the medicine curriculum in English”. English is part of her professional and academic life at international conferences where some, if not all, talks are delivered in English. Medical Arabic is only used in the Syrian medical community. She mentions an example of a seminar by a Saudi Arab presenter who started his talk in Arabic but struggled with the Arabic terms so he switched to English. The moment he switched to English, only a quarter of the audience remained in the room. She was one of those who left due to her low English proficiency, and she left for another seminar delivered in Arabic. She is in favour of having some subjects in English and others in Arabic to create this balance where “embarrassment of the doctor could be avoided especially in cases where they have to use the internet technology in the academic medical context which is English-dominant”.

4.5 Role of English in the contemporary Syrian doctor’s professional life

Medical students’ recurrent reference to the impact of globalisation and English as a global language (EGL) on the medicine field was clear in the data. This section presents facets of the role English, with reference to Arab nationalism, plays in the students’ construction of their ‘doctor’ identity where learning to be a doctor means entering the professional community and therefore leads to a fundamental identity change.

The Arab national pride exists strongly and is interestingly shown and expressed by students while talking about the value of English and its role in their academic and professional life. This reflects the country’s national policy and the preservation of the Arabic language which students value with cautious acknowledgement of their low English proficiency as evidenced in Yasser’s comment: “we are proud of our Arabic but ashamed of our English, two extreme cases”. The following excerpt summarises this Arabic/English dichotomy students create while stressing on their Syrian Arab identity:

We are distinct and proud we speak Arabic more than any other Arab countries who uses English and French words in their daily conversations. We, people of Syria, have the strongest sense of nationalism among all other Arabs; we are holding tightly to Arabic. Even our colloquial Arabic is understood by all Arabs in the region. So, this is a special thing, we want to preserve it and we are very proud. But we want English to communicate. We will not lose our Arabic language if we study English at university. We have retained Arabic. We are in an Arab country and we have to speak Arabic
100% but in science we should draw a separation line. An excellent example is our President who speaks Arabic to his guests although he can speak English. This is a source of pride for us. (FG1, GC)

Mira, an ESP teacher, seemed to have a shared view of construction of Syrian Arab identity when she commented that ‘we are one of the very few Arab countries which teach medicine in Arabic we are so much proud’. Her words meet students’ celebratory words of ancient Arab Islamic contributions to science in the Middle Ages as stated in the following excerpt from her interview:

Students are defenders of the Arab identity and mentioned names of Arab scientists and I was really interested to listen to them and I said ok great I do appreciate and I respect all those great inventors and doctors and scientists because each one of them actually was not only a doctor he was a poet, engineer, he did a lot of things but…(Mira, ESP TI)

Her interview went on pause after the ‘but’ and she moved to talk about her highly encouraging tone in favour of teaching medicine in English since time has changed and Arabs are no longer pioneers in science. These “splits” in her narrative indicate a need to pause and reconsider what all this is telling us. The value system of this informant is expressed here through reference to a medical doctor in the past era as a polymath whose expertise spans a significant number of different subject areas. This section demonstrated the Arab identity side of the Syrian doctors and clearly illuminated the dual view of the medical self; interplay of the Arab identity side and the medical side of which English is of a paramount value. This issue is to be discussed in further detail in the next section.

My language is who I am. I am an Arab holding an Arab identity, I speak it, my name is Arabic. I cannot really describe it to you but English will help me reach what I want, reach the medical people abroad so I can develop my medical self and finally return to benefit my home country (FG2, Lama, GB).

The following diagram illustrates what medical students reported with regards to the way English contributes to the formation of a ‘new identity’ to the Syrian doctor. Students regard English as a means of creating an additional identity for its second language speakers. The following extract is indicative of the belief in the powerful role English can play in the formation of a ‘new identity’.

What distinguishes you from others is not the foreign language itself; it is what the language enabled you to reach that distinguishes you. In my opinion, not only English, but learning any foreign language makes a new person out of you. I mean when my English is very good, if I am a person
who speaks English so it is like that I have a new aspect of education, a new identity (Rami, FG2, GA).

![Image: Figure 17: English in doctor identity construction]

In his turn, Ahmad associated learning English with forming an entirely different individual personality. He commented that,

> Any person who speaks a second language will have a second world to know, a new world of ideas, principles and even a new society. If I speak a second language, it is as if I possess knowledge of a completely different person. It is an unimaginable privilege especially for me doctors…especially for me. (Ali, FG2, GA)

Sinan (FG2, GD) stated that “any language is a new second form of education so imagine the outcome in the case of English which is a global aspect of education. English is a global culture I wish I could get...it adds a second education and a new, another identity” and Rama (FG2, GD), similarly, believes that “every person, no matter what type of personality he has, he becomes a new person upon learning a new language”. Jack (FG1, GC) also referred to how English is required “to develop the doctor’s personality (identity) in the private clinics and hospitals”. Ayham F (FG1, GA) shared the view too saying “English creates a new person in life”.

The above quotes reflect students’ perceptions of how learning English can be a major ingredient of their construction of their medical identity for multiple reasons of which I
will present the major related four ingredients in the rest of this chapter. Before going further in how students construct their medical identity through English, I need to report what I view as powerful material in the second round of focus group discussions, which is that nearly all informants whether in favour of English as medium of instruction in medicine or not, they presented themselves as fully determined to improve their English proficiency regardless of for what purposes that is. They described themselves as average to good English users, aspirants to master the second language (English) to meet their ideal medical self (FG2 discussions).

► English is an educational and professional add-on, extra dimension, value-added (iḍāfah); a privilege

Medical students equate intellectuality and good doctoring with knowledge of English. In the search for defining the medical self, it is inferred from FG2 discussions that English principally stands as a global language is inarguably an “add-on”, “privilege” to the doctor identity. The following extract from Ihab is an indicative of this issue:

> English in general is education... it means when any person studies it he adds privilege to his ‘self’...English is a very big ‘bonus’ ‘valuable’ for any medic or educated person around the world in whatever field. For me, it represents an “extra ingredient” at the educational and professional level (future) (Ihab, FG2, G4).

Having these idealised views of the value-added English to the medical bodies, one question may be raised about where students get these ideas about English from as they cannot be constructed in a vacuum. When students, mainly year 1 & 2, talked of their low level in English and their aspirations to master English, they demonstrated that they currently do not use English in their academic studies but they wish they could read English medical textbooks. Rather than being encouraged or reinforced by the Medical Faculty to study medicine in English, the majority of students explicitly referred to personal influence on raising awareness to the need for English proficiency improvement. (e.g., a medical doctor brother, medicine peers, an English language teacher father, a doctor father or mother, a medical tutor in the Faculty of Medicine.

> When we arrived at the university we had our awareness raised that we (doctors) have to learn English and do our best. The awareness was triggered because we have to practise in clinics and hospitals so we need English. (FG 1, GC)
In line with Ihab’s comment, Ayham F suggested that English is an ‘add-on’ to one’s education and he recalls the Middle Ages wherein Arabs were science pioneers at the time and where the entire world had to translate from Arabic and it is time now to learn their language (English) to obtain their knowledge since, in his view, Arabs are “backward” at present. English is seen as a means to access Western advancement, to keep pace with latest development and subsequently upgrade scientific research in the Arab World to retain the glory of past contribution to science.

Positioning Arabs as inferior to the superior ‘West’ notion of the ‘West’ as in the sense used by informants in the study in their constant comparison of Arabs against the west cannot be fairly discussed without grounding this in the thesis of Said’s seminal work ‘Orientalism’ (1978). Said focuses on the interplay between the "Occident" (the West: England, France, and the United States), and the "Orient" (The Middle East and Far East). The dichotomy as Said argues is ‘man-made’. In his words, Orientalism as an exercise of power uses categories like Oriental and Western as both the starting and the end points of analysis, research, and public policy….the result is usually to polarize the distinction-the Oriental becomes more Oriental, the Westerner more Western- and limit the human encounter between different cultures, traditions, and societies. In short, from its earliest modern history to the present, Orientalism as a form of thought for dealing with the foreign has typically shown the altogether regrettable tendency of any knowledge based on such hard-and-fast distinctions as "East" and "West": to channel thought into a West or an East compartment. Because this tendency is right at the center of Orientalist theory, practice, and values found in the West, the sense of Western power over the Orient is taken for granted as having the status of scientific truth. (Said, 1978:45-46)

From a different angle, English is seen by Moataz to represent what he calls, a ‘capital’ that is the distinguishing factor upon which a good medical doctor is judged.

English is capital, education. Once one starts learning English one feels he is picking the fruit of an extra value...that he is distinct from others in that not
everyone has possession of what he has already. I am the one who has learnt it so I am ultimately different from others. (Moataz, FG2, GA)

This “capital” is a “privilege” and a social “distinguishing factor” from other doctors since it allows him to “access knowledge ahead of others” which in turn enriches his/her medical knowledge. English seems to be associated with “distinctiveness” which the medical students aspire to reach through the mastery of English and medical English since “a doctor with English proficiency is absolutely ‘better’ from others” (Ayham F, FG2, GA).

► Medical communication across cultures

The “culture” notion is indispensably addressed by students when talking about the value of English adds to doctors as participants in communities of doctors in other cultures. Jack, for instance, seems enthusiastic about communicating with other cultures and he singles out English as a vital tool in bridging the gap between cultures. He speculates that by mastering a second language (English), one can better understand and interact with other cultures; especially the English culture which is “a great one up to the present” (Jack, FG2, GC).

In the global medical community, “doctor needs English to cope and communicate with the world” (Ali, FG2, GA). English is of an outstanding value in verbal and non-verbal communication since doctors across the globe presumably speak English; the international language of science (Yasser, FG2, GC). It is seen as very important to connect with the global medical community in medical conferences; on the cyberspace etc., which are dominated by English.

A conference is an academic exchange. So we are supposed to give information to others (Foreign participants) and they should do the same. To communicate with them, we need English as the presenter is supposed to do it in English. Most people do not have the capability to do it in English so they switch to Arabic. (Kamal, FG1, GC)

Communication with the international medical community through English language appears as a major constituent of doctor identity. Fadi said:

If I don’t know English I cannot speak with other doctors who speak English no matter what nationality they hold, French, Italian ...they all have a basis in medical English. (Fadi, FG2, GB)
Students appear to associate English with acceptance in the international medical community not only globally but even within the Arab world (Gulf States and Egypt). It enables access for graduate doctors to be members of the medical community regionally and globally.

If a Syrian doctor wants to practise medicine in the Gulf States, he will need to be proficient in English. Employers in medicine will prefer Lebanese to Syrians regardless of competence in medical knowledge because the Lebanese speaks two foreign languages; English and French. He will not be accepted in Egypt and the Gulf States if he doesn’t speak English. When delivering a conference paper, English is needed as a doctor cannot present it in Arabic even if the other audience is from Arab countries. For example those from Egypt will not understand the Arabic medical terminology. (FG1, GB)

The constant comparison to other doctors in the Arab region and worldwide can be seen as a sign of a common sense of belonging to professional community. As medical communities, in students’ views, operate in the medium of English, then students are left with one single choice; that is of learning the language through which doctors communicate in the field, develop their medical knowledge and exchange expertise.

► Professional development

English as a prerequisite to progress in medicine was a recurrent theme in the data. Knowledge is vast and learning is limitless; and doctors never cease to learn and, in students’ testimony, English seems to have a profound role in medical students’ acquisition of broader medical knowledge since the latest advances in science are primarily accessed through English.

To understand a medical subject better.. to deepen your understanding of a certain topic you need to rely on English to guarantee good knowledge. (Ihab, FG2, G4)

Another student, Mustafa, communicates in English and reads medical research in English. He states his commitment to English “as long as all new medical research is disseminated in English”. He seeks development and he feels confident enough to gain the knowledge in any field without seeking translators’ help. In other words, professional development is not easily reached if doctors are dependent on translations which may not be able to cope with the pace of medical publications worldwide.
Learning never ends, every day there is something new in medicine and it is definitely available only in English. Professional development after university is impossible if one doesn’t speak English. Update in medicine is available in English anywhere in the world so you have to speak English to cope with medicine and with what is going on in the field as you cannot wait for knowledge to get translated; it will be too late. Any research paper on the web is disseminated in English and it takes a year to be available in Arabic translation. There will be no Arabic version at the start; there will be the English one only. Even medical conferences are done in English. (Mustafa, FG1, GB)

It appears therefore, according to students, that English is vital for a doctor’s professional development. In order to develop themselves, medical students appear more aware of the need for learning English which “is everywhere in Syrians lives’. At the academic level, English is now a prequisite to apply for entering academia in the “teaching assistant competition”. English is a requirement to “apply for scholarships” offered by the Syrian government or other foreign institutions abroad. It is also the language of assessment in “international examination for medical licensure” such as the UK PLAB test and the United States Medical Licensing Examination (USMLE). Therefore, English is professionally important to “travel abroad to practice medicine in a broader different community and to pursue higher studies in international medical institutions not to mention its role as a tool to “access the World Wide Web”.

If you seek knowledge, you need English to get it from any reference source. We see discontented doctors who are older than us and who don’t speak English. English is integrated in our lives to a great extent. I mean that anyone who is younger than us knows that English is very important. (FG1, GC)

Other students expressed this view of professional development from another angle that includes development of the country as a whole, ‘to take part in building society’ (Ayham, FG1, GD), embracing a national duty towards his society as the driving force to use English as a means to guarantee personal development which feeds wider national development.

English is the language of science. We have to admit our society is less developed than others, so we have to develop our country... we have to excel in scientific research to pioneer in its development. So, we need to have good English in my opinion to do achieve this. (Fadi, FG2, GB)

Students’ association of English with development and ‘openness to the world’ was also evident in their implicit criticism of Syria’s foreign language policy which is not
placing high value on learning English as a key road to ‘openness’ to the western world; ‘openness’ is linked with learning foreign languages. In their view,

the country’s current policy is generally directed towards the reservation of the Arabic language by using Arabic in education but now we are becoming more open-minded and we are teaching English and French. Foreign language learning is very important and a primary thing to reach openness to the culture of the foreign language speakers. (FG1, GC)

I conclude this section by drawing attention to a significant issue which relates to the significance of the stages at which medical students groups are. Freshers in year 1 and 2 demonstrated high positive perceptions about English as a global language and all the issues it represents to the Syrian medical doctor despite the fact that they have not yet got engaged in English language in their academic studies. The romanticised perceptions held by most of student groups in this study regardless of their year of study could be interpreted as constructed by, not real immediate needs, rather by the surrounding social and cultural norms, scientific discourse, media, political ideologies alongside an admiration and aspiration to an imagined reality that they believe English can take them to.

4.6 English as a status-marker

4.6.1 English and status of medical practice in Syria

The impact of Global English was evident in students’ words on the power of the western world (mainly the United States), which controls the medical research and excels in it. An image of the West as ‘superior’ is represented in students’ testimony; the Americans are the active leaders in science and development who fund scientific research and they consider this a fact ‘whether we like it or not; as they (Americans) are the best’ (Kamal, FG1, GD). In the present era, the United States of America, therefore, is seen by medical students as the authoritative owner of scientific research and the most powerful country in the world, an empire which the whole world tail behind. Through recollection of the Islamic Golden Age (c.750 CE – c.1258 CE) when Arab scientists among others within the Islamic civilisation contributed to advances in science during the Middle Ages, students expressed their wish to restore the Arab’s glory in science pioneering. They regret the loss of this glory and acknowledge that English is the
language of science at present which they have to master as evidenced in the following quote:

We have to learn all sciences in which they are better than us (pioneers) not only medicine. When we were pioneers in science, all the rest of the world had to translate from Arabic and they studied Arabic. In the past, Arabs were the pioneers in science so all the world taught sciences in the Arabic language. We have to cope with who is the best and what is the best thing? English of course. (FG1, GD) (emphasis added)

Regarding English as an essential language in medicine is agreed among students who assert that “as long as there are pioneers you have to learn their language not only in medicine but in all sciences” (FG1, GD). One student, commented describing what he considers a ‘problem’ of Arabs, including himself, is that they are “opportunists; in any bilateral relation line in exchanging knowledge in conferences for example, we are the beneficiaries and not benefitting others because we speak a language that others don’t understand” (Kamal, FG1, GD). His view goes beyond the immediate benefit of English to contribute to the world knowledge through the medium of English as long as disseminating research in Arabic will not make it reach the wider global medical community. While medical students in this study seem pragmatically keen on learning English in medicine, they justify the preference of English based on its association with ‘knowledge production’ that the US has its ownership.

If we were producing knowledge in Arabic they (The West) would have to translate to Arabic. If it was the Arabs who are working, Arabic would have been considered in science instead of English (as a language of medicine). They are the ones who work and develop at the moment. The US is the most powerful country especially in scientific research (US).

In the end we have to pay the price that we are underdeveloped (Ayham). When we become better than them we can study medicine in Arabic, if we develop science we reach a new phase where we invent a term in Arabic then they will have to learn it or translate it from our language. The language of science is English due to America not Britain. (FG1, GC & D)

Students seem aware that the power of English is associated with globalisation and Americanisation or "McDonaldsisation" (Ritzer, 1993:1) which is “a system designed to impose the American economic model on the whole world for the sole benefit of the USA and some other rich countries ” (Zughoul, 2003:109). Teachers also espouse those views; an ESP teacher reiterated students’ conceptions on the need to cope with time change across civilisations and she called for a pragmatic use of English in science
acknowledging that Arabs no longer contribute to science as they used to in past eras. Consequently, the language of the pioneer is, what she believes, needed to be mastered:

I have to think logically...we have to admit that we did start civilisation, but we didn’t continue working on that, so we did start but now we have to move on with those who take civilisation forward. Since the ancient times, what have we contributed in the last 1000 years to the medicine field? Nothing. We are receptors now, we cannot deny it, we have to master this language because we need to move on. (Mira, ESP TI)

This data shows attitudes of teachers and students towards English. Although students seem to favour English in medicine, they show how their preference is due to the power of the role English occupies in medicine and the power of scientific research in English-speaking countries and its dissemination in the English language. America is a pioneer in the medicine filed and a major contributor to its development; that is the reason that all medical references are written in English (FG1, GD). Other medical students in group B, state that ‘if German was the global language we would learn German but it is English (FG1, GB). According to them, English is ‘more expressive than Arabic only if English is used in the scientific or medical sense while Arabic is more expressive in literature’ (FG1, GC). They assume that English is the global language and compare it to Arabic. They need English for the medical and the social identity.

Alongside the reference to funding scientific research in the United States, medical students agreed on that “the best surgeons are based in America” although they recognise that good medical practitioners exist everywhere but “it is known that America is pioneer in all fields”. Mohammad commented this statement by saying that “there are great surgeons everywhere but the environment in America provides facilities for them to develop and invent new things very much quicker than any other surgeons” (FG1, GD).

What stands out in the discussions is how they conceive the prominent role English takes in the world as a mere ‘fact’ since English

is worldwide used in medicine and developed countries such as Germany and France teach medicine in English, English is currently the language of medicine, science and the internet, America is responsible for 95% of the knowledge and new medical research discoveries, at least the medical. (FG1, GA, B & C)

This could be interpreted as a ‘received wisdom’, a ‘myth’ as long as science and medicine in particular are globally English. Students are driven by the need to learn
English ‘in order to be able to cope with the world and the up-to-date discoveries which are all disseminated in English, you need English; we need to share information. Any doctor who wants to publish a paper in a journal has to do it in one language (English). It is impossible to ask translators to translate it into 20 different languages’ (FG1, GB, C, & D).

The power of English in medicine can also be revealed in medical tutors’ explicit demand of students’ mastering English. The pressure that medical tutors exercise on medical students is shown in their constant recommendation for students to independently study English references to improve their medical English (FG1, GC). As agreed by most students,

all medical tutors advise us to self-study references and be autonomous and improve your English; all of them without an exception. Doctors always ask us in the interview exams: show me your English! We want you to improve it. (FG1, GD)

Power produces reality. In order to understand the ‘reality’ of a situation like the one in Tishreen University, considering issues of power, I analyse my data borrowing Foucault’s use of the term “power” in positive terms and the conceptualisation of power and his formula of power/knowledge as mutually interchangeably linked especially the reference to medical knowledge which is the primary interest of my informants in this study. Foucault argued that:

No knowledge is formed without a system of communication, registration, accumulation, and displacement that is in itself a form of power. No power, on the other hand, is exercised without the extraction, appropriation, distribution, or restraint of knowledge. At this level there is not knowledge [connaissance] on the one side and society on the other, or science and the state, but the basic forms of “power-knowledge” [“pouvoir - savoir”]. (1994/2006:17)

In this study, medicine stands out as a powerful discipline in comparison with other scientific disciplines. Medical students view other disciplines as the least in need of research updates; ‘other sciences don’t have to learn English because they don’t need to keep up-to-date with recent development. For example in the Pharmacy Department, students aim to graduate not to improve their English (Rama, FG1, GD). That is not the only comparison they made. They repeatedly referred to other medical students in private medical schools in Syria as in the following quotation,
We are the elite and have the ability to study in English (the students of Al Kalamoon University for example are doing well in studying English and we are better than them). (FG1, GC)

Their use of the word ‘elite’ is grounded in the fact that applicants in the state medical schools are required to achieve higher scores in the national baccalaureate than those in private English-medium universities. These students view themselves as even better than other peers in private universities. This point is illustrated in Kamal’s following quote when he compares himself to a friend and medicine colleague in a private English medium university:

Why would I not manage to study in English too if I had the chance to? It is a matter of time only; in two or three months anyone can adapt to a new language of learning. We, students in state universities, are distinguished; students in Al Kalamoun (a private English-medium university) are low achievers in the baccalaureate. We are the best; we are hard working so if those who are way lower than us could cope with English so imagine how well we will do in English if were taught in a similar way. (Kamal, FG1, GD)

Another related point raised by students is their view of language learning as an easy task for medical students who are presumably the best brains in the country. Foreign language learning, in their view, is “a piece of cake”, and EMP should be easily acquired by time and repetition especially when entering an English speaking community. It is, in the end, memorisation and you don’t have to think and invent in languages; you take it from others. When you repeat something it becomes in the subconscious and this is what we want. If I listen to a sentence that is said correctly by a good speaker I can say it more confidently after repeating it many times. The most important thing is to have the basics in the language so you can survive in an English speaking community. Hence, anyone will be able to learn when he is among member of the society he is in so he can learn from them. (FG1, GD)

Students’ view of language learning (i.e., English) is reinforced by ESP teachers who evaluated their students’ English proficiency. Razan, for instance, narrated one incident which took place in one of her EMP classes where she taught them the basics in English (grammar and vocabulary) which they had not studied at school. She reported that although the material was simple, the number of the students who knew the answers was very small. The point she wanted to make is that students do learn by memorising so their English is poor to an extent that they could not distinguish between words
which have slight differences in meaning. She blamed the inefficient language teaching at school (Razan, ESP TI). Zia, another ESP teacher in the Medical Faculty, also shared the same opinion when she said that “medical students have the ability to memorise, to learn by heart” and she mentioned on example of how they failed to read an article in the exam because there was one word dropped out.

4.6.2 English and doctor status

In their discussion of their medical tutors and English, English is represented the social distinguishing factor when taking about the “good doctor”. Mohammad regards the doctor who speaks English having a higher profile.

The doctor who speaks English has a feather on his head\(^\text{5}\). In my view, the person who speaks English deserves extra credits or points. (Malek, FG2, GC)

Similarly, students went on to compare two Syrian doctors on English proficiency ground and most of them highly appraised doctors whom they know, such one of their medical tutor at the Faculty, and who were educated in English. For example, John explicitly delineates the development probability of the doctor with/without English proficiency and predicts a sharp increase in the level of development for the English-user medical doctors. He said:

\begin{quote}
In the first 6 years, both doctors; the one who speaks English and the Arabic-only speaker may be at the same but if we compare them on over years on a line chart, the one with English proficiency will do much better in the longer term, his opportunity for development is much higher. (John, FG2, GC)
\end{quote}

The discussion of the status of doctors in this section is only situated in students’ own views. What is apparent is that they classify bad/good doctor distinction on the grounds

\(^{5}\) ‘a feather on the head’ is an idiomatic phrase in Arabic used in reference to people with honour or other distinguishing factors. Equivalent to the English: ‘a feather in the cap’
of mastering English. In order to be ‘a good doctor’, one has to master English (Lama FG1, GB). Another student clearly expressed that she under mines the medical doctor unless he/she masters English; “If you don’t speak English, you cannot be a doctor”. (Dina, FG2, GB). A third student assumed that the doctor who reads in English acquires better knowledge and any “person who knows two languages, literally, is a person with a more developed brain than any others.” (Ali, FG1, GA).

Apparently, status is conferred upon medical individuals through English which, students believe, secures a reputable respected place for the doctor who is keen on improving himself to falling in the margins of the medicine profession. English, in this respect, grants a better status because it is

a passport to everything that is useful, mostly a passport in the medicine profession. If the doctor wants to assert himself and who doesn’t want to be marginalised in the profession he has to be a medic and follow updates in English whether he works abroad or here. (Yasser, FG2, GC)

Having access to medical knowledge through English, it is clear in the data that students are concerned of being excluded in the wider global community if they do not speak English. For instance, one informant holds a belief that an inferior status is what a doctor will end up at when compared to those who study medicine in English whom she places at a supreme level. She commented:

To be at a high level, the doctor has to be, at least, aware of what is going on. If he wants to progress he is obliged to do his work in English. If he researches in English he will give the impression that he is trying to get additional information not accessible in Arabic. At least he gets the information quicker than the one who doesn’t know English. I would feel so inferior to those who study in English...so I would go into decline and go back one step, whereas I could be at a higher level...so I study in English and get to a higher level and make use of it. (Lama , FG2, GB)

Very much the same conception is noticed in Kamal’s comments on what English represents to him; based on his professional concern as well. He emphasised his rejection of being a ‘beggar’ in urgent need of translators’ help to translate for doctors the latest advances in medicine. The metaphor is suggestive of a more complex notion that is to do with doctor’s status and the influence of medicine where they view themselves as practitioners of the elite profession in society. For him, seeking knowledge cannot be paused until translators do the job. By mastering English, doctors can have instant access to the latest knowledge and can boost their self-confidence and pride by ensuring that the acquired knowledge is all credited to him/her only.
If you want to be developed you have to keep up-to-date and updates are all in the medium of English... I will mention the example of Dr.X who studied in Britain and his English is very good. It is impossible to talk to him about a topic without him knowing it. He keeps up-to-date and reads a lot on the web to get the latest updates. The doctor who relies on Arabic only will remain a beggar waiting for others to give him knowledge while in English you feel you are important and that you are doing the learning yourself. (FG2, GD)

Respect and high intellectual capability are two criteria ascribed to the medic who has acquired good English proficiency as illustrated in the following quotes:

I speak English. I think the doctor who speaks English is more up-to-date. I certainly respect him more as he knows better; he knows the latest updates. Mustafa, FG2, GB

Listen, when other students found out we are studying English textbooks they felt the gap in scientific knowledge between us. For example when Dr.X (British Graduate) asks any question, we are the ones who answer; others cannot. Of course, this is not their fault as they studied in Arabic so the difference is in the order in which the information is formed. These students felt awkward and that they should use English reference books for study. They later studied in English even though they had no intention to study abroad after graduation and they improved a great deal. I know such people; they are my friends. (Kamal, FG1, GC)

In line with medical students’ description of themselves as good doctors only with reference to English, students referred on several occasions to “other” doctors in other countries, mainly the Gulf Arabian States and the United States of America, as an example of their admiration of the ‘other’ doctors who are, in their view, better and surpass the Syrian doctor in their English proficiency. This comparison is justified as stated earlier in Chapter 3, Syria is the only Arab country which has who maintained a strong teaching tradition of science, particularly medicine through the medium of Arabic (Zughoul, 2003, 124).

We are not like some of the Gulf States where they study English from primary school so they go to university and they don’t suffer. Today we met one Syrian doctor in the hospital who was visiting from America. He is very knowledgeable. He is great, he studied in America”. (FG1, GD)

While talking about other Arab doctors, students demonstrated what they believe Syrian doctors lack. Being the only Arab doctors educated in Arabic, they feel vulnerable to criticism by others. However they expressed confidence in their abilities to reach the level of other doctors in English acquisition.

We have doctor friends in Egypt. From the looks of them you don’t expect they speak English but when they want to speak they can, as if they have
always been speaking the language ...if they can, then so can we speak, why not? They study medicine in English, they think in English. We can study a book in English but we cannot think in English. We envy them they study everything in English not like us we are taught only one subject. (FG1, GC)

Their experience of interaction with doctors from the wider Arab medical community seems to have influenced on their over stated realisation of the need for English in order to engage and interact with other peers in other parts of the world.

4.7 Marginalisation of ESP teachers in the institution

Another form of power is manifested in the underestimation of ESP teachers in the medical institution which the society’s ‘norms’ confer upon them a lower status. In the Medical Faculty, lacking the medical competence is a fair basis on which language teachers are undermined by other medical tutors, faculty teachers and by students themselves. This could be conceived in the students’ own words of which I quote the following:

A big problem that we face is that the Higher Institute of Languages sends an English teacher to teach in the Medical Faculty. I don’t know who makes these decisions and why they recruit the English language teacher to teach us. We want specialists to teach us; medical practitioners, I mean, or maybe the English language teachers can do some medical training in the medical course. For example the English literature graduate can go on a training course about the medical topic he/she will teach so they can efficiently teach in the Pharmacy, Medicine and Dentistry faculties. (FG1, GD)

Students looked at this issue from another angle giving credits to subject specialists over ESP teachers. They asserted that “the one who teaches the specialized English is an English teacher who is not qualified to teach the medical terms” and he is “not good enough to write the exam questions for this specialized subject” (FG1, GC).

While preferring specialists over ESP teachers, students appeared to find justifications to what they see as lack of expertise in the medical content. For instance, they expressed their reasons for not having an “English language teacher”; mainly because of his lack of medical knowledge and accordingly his inability to give them the learning and help they need (FG1, GC & D). The blame, in their view, rests on the Faculty management bodies for their ill-planning and organisation of the course and teachers’ recruitment:

Everything and everyone is placed in the wrong place. We are students of medicine in year 2 and medically speaking. We don’t understand the medical
textbook even if it was written in Arabic. How can we expect the language teacher if he is not a specialist to understand and teach it? (Lama, FG1, GD)

Razan, an experienced EMP teacher, talked about the power covertly exerted on them in the Medical Faculty by faculty management personnel and students themselves. She said:

It remains a fact that English subject is secondary; we suffer as they consider us strangers in the faculty. For example, if you’d ever want to request a change of timetable, especially in the Medical Faculty, they will immediately remind you that they would do this because we are not the ‘medical tutors’. So they treat us as if we are not their teachers…so we are outsiders. (Razan, ESP TI)

Zia, like Razan reiterated the point of the underestimation of language teachers and provides another aspect of the ESP teacher marginalisation when she emphasises that ‘only in the Medical Faculty, the ESP teacher is not important’. She expressed, through her teaching experience in the medical faculty, her feeling of fear to bring about any change; ‘I am scared of giving any suggestions with regards to teaching English in the faculty because they are unwilling to change. Because English is secondary for the administrators, they don’t cooperate with the teacher and they don’t change the timetable’. There seems to be a lack of cooperation. Again, she seemed frustrated when she said:

I have to accept as I’m not a member of university staff so I don’t know my rights. Management in the Faculty only talk to us when they are not happy with something. There are no inspectors.

She talked of how they were not cooperative at all with her and the Faculty’s Scientific Deputy forced her to change the marking criteria according to what they saw as appropriate. In fact, Zia showed that she is resigned in the way she is treated when she clearly states that “the medical doctor who knows medicine and knows English well can help the student in English and the medical subject at the same time” (ESP TI).

Teachers appear fed up and undermined by the institution. Mira narrated her story in the faculties of Medicine and Pharmacy wherein language teachers are not treated well money-wise as they do not have the same pay as other faculty tutors. Their requests with regards to course timetable and setting are never met by the Medicine Faculty and always replied by ‘we are a bigger faculty and a more important faculty let them change’. She summed the situation up as ‘there is no respect whatsoever and they are not interested at all’.
The whole system is to be blamed, the whole mind-set which controls everything because you know that one mentality is spreading. Yes, I don’t know how but if the teachers are not respected enough and they are not paid enough and if they are not motivated enough and they are insulted sometimes I am not saying they have the right to be boring but I cannot either blame them harshly for this behaviour. (Mira, ESP TI).

Razan gave examples of this disrespect they receive in the faculty when the officials attend to students’ unrealistic complaints without monitoring the quality of their teaching.

There is no kind of teaching inspection or evaluation. Management people in the faculty only listen to what students complain about teachers; trivial ones like writing hard exam questions, teaching full hours, false claims of teacher threatening to fail them, etc.. This is so embarrassing … This is untrue. Isn’t it a shame that they listen to students’ complaints unquestioningly?

Remarking on the behaviour of the institution toward ESP teachers, Mira urged for a more respect and a change of the stereotypical view of the ESP in the Medical School as secondary to subject specialists. The following characterises her view of her inferior expressed role:

The mind-set must be changed. Management people in the faculty must respect English or European languages; they must respect teachers in general and English language teachers in particular. They have to create motivation for both teachers and students. When they prescribe to me as a teacher to teach few page-handouts; it is an indirect way of saying the course is a waste of time and we don’t want either the teacher not the students to be bothered. Believe me this is how you will perceive it and this is how I perceived it. (Mira, ESP TI)

While discussing the issue of medium of instruction, Razan expressed her favour of English as the medium of instruction for a few subjects but ‘but not at the expense of general English’. She emphasized undermine of ESP teachers in the medical faculty and the lack of cooperation between language teachers and medic tutors which surfaces as a core need for a better delivery of the EMP courses at the university.

The biggest mistake is to marginalise the English teachers as they don’t trust them, I assure you. They don’t want to cooperate with them so that they can both discuss what students need to be taught in order to have a good background in English before they study one content subject in English. (Razan, ESP TI)
Another reason for the low status of ESP teachers, as Nancy suggested, is that the ESP teacher is not part of the medical institution community, ‘there is some kind of underestimation of the English teacher. He is not part of their faculties, sometimes they believe he is not qualified they don’t know his qualification’, Nancy said. Students’ behaviour towards teachers; students also look down to English teachers. One dilemma she faces is that students are not aware of her qualification, ‘they don’t know I am qualified and I have a Master’s in ESP’. She continued to defend herself by not blaming the students and by referencing to the need for ESP teachers to remind students of their competence and teaching qualifications. She said:

I need to prove to the students that I am good in English …they ask me strange questions and I need to answer so they can trust that I am good. They have had bad experience with teachers who are not qualified so they initially think I am not good enough for them. (Nancy, ESP TI)

Nancy expressed her disappointment and despair she constantly reassured me that her feelings about her teaching experience at the Medical Faculty are so clear, “you can see from my tone there is no need to explain anymore because really get disappointed …bad feeling you know, as if I’m doing nothing”. She gave examples of how some students intentionally ‘correct’ her in the class, others try to ‘confuse’ her by checking ‘on purpose in class whether I know how to pronounce the medical word or not’. She then remarked that they don’t do the same with other medical tutors.

They try to test the teacher if he is good as if they know he is good or not as if they are better than him. This is not the case with the specialist tutors or doctors because they taught them they know the teacher better than me. I’m new for them, they are testing me...experimenting with me. (Nancy, ESP TI)

Razan agreed on the similar point as expressed by her in the following quote:

If you are not self-confident students can eat you without salt” that is why the teacher has to have some experience in teaching especially in medicine

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6 ‘Eat someone without salt’ is a metaphor used to express one’s anger with another and his wish to enjoy torturing him.
because students are arrogant. Sometimes you have to be tough with students to make them feel that are still in need of us.

The head of the English Centre, Lama, also remarked that Faculties never coordinate with language teachers and they do prefer the subject specialist to them. She also noted that the “stereotypical view of the language teacher in our society is the one who is omniscient” and language teachers are being threatened by students since any complaints to the higher bodies in the university by students about the language teachers will result in an immediate penalisation act without any interrogations (UMI, 3).

Mudar has also argued for a change of the “mentality” of the people within the Medical School. However, he directed criticism to the subject specialist professors in the Faculty. His comments mostly revolved around the unequal comparison between language teachers who are mainly graduates (BA or MA holders) from the Arts and Humanities Department on one hand and the medical tutors who are mainly PhD holders. He describes his perception of the medical tutors at the faculty which reflects his attitude towards the position of the ESP teachers as ‘scapegoats’. He said:

We have to change the mentality in the Faculty of Medicine; professors, medicine professors, think that to be a teacher is not enough. Moreover, to study at the faculty of Art and Humanities is ‘nothing’. They don’t like to see that ELT graduates are better. I am tortured by this doctors’ mentality in the Faculty of Medicine. Many professors look down at you (language teachers) but I don’t care after all. (Mudar, ESP TI)

In his constant reassuring defence of his profession, he continued to highlight what he believes is lacking in medical tutors, which is “teacher training”, “learning how to teach”. He commented:

When you are a professor, when you’ve got a PhD, this doesn’t mean (English or medicine professors) you are qualified. The doctorate degree doesn’t guarantee being a good teacher. I, all the time, say medic tutors need training in teaching. I’m defending my performance. Scientifically speaking, you can’t compare medicine professors to English teachers; they are not the same although both perform same job (teaching). But what matters or counts here the length of teaching experience and length of academic study not the knowledge of the subject matter. All the time medical professors perform in a bad way and language teachers are very fresh and perform marvellously. (Mudar, ESP TI)

Mudar was not only very confident about his teaching qualification which he thinks surpasses the medical tutors’, but also voiced his lack of “freedom” based on the
misperception and the status of the ESP teacher that is subject to the PhD degree attainment. I present, next, his narrative account on this issue.

We don’t have freedom. Maybe sometimes they say that he (ESP teacher) is still a fresh teacher but I think if I am professor and I do what I am doing now really lots of people will be against me but now nobody is paying attention to me because they think I’m the scum of the earth. If I am a professor, when I comment I change lots of things. If I am a professor and they feel that I got some power but now they see me only as a language tutor. One of the reason is I’m not a member of staff the second is the age factor. I look young so they do not pay attention to me as I have no authority or power. (Mudar, ESP TI)

Nancy appeared to be less confident about herself as an ESP teacher although she repeatedly mentioned how she considers herself qualified enough to teach EMP. Her lack of confidence pertained to medical students’ attitude who used show disrespect to ESP teachers generally. She summarised her feelings as follow:

I’m confident I am not a bad teacher. Why do they believe the opposite in the Medical Faculty? I need a period of time to gain their respect to make them believe I am good enough for them. As a teacher there, you need to pretend to be strict so you don’t allow students to discuss anything irrelevant to the subject in class. This is against what I believe in but I need to pretend that way, to play the role I am in control of everything I know better than they do, in English of course, but I am not like this. I don’t like this I like them to have their own ideas but it is impossible. I need to get them to trust me...so I got used to this; you just learn how to deal with them in the end. (Nancy, ESP TI)

Nancy referred to what she finds a key factor in the low status conferred upon ESP teachers in the Medical faculty which is the “mistrust in English teacher because the teacher is not empowered and the specialist is more like in control”. Her reference to the comparison between language teachers and subject specialists is not based on her belief in the differences in qualifications or competence. Rather, it is the fact that language teachers are temporary; they teach occasionally in the Medical Faculty while subject specialists are physically members of the institution and in contact with students more often during the 6-year medical programme.

Liza criticised the mentality of the medical students and other fellow teachers whom she described as “low profile”. She commented:

The subject is secondary, timing is not important, content is not important. When you ask the administration what you need to teach you get no answer. There is always this inferior perception about us. Anything happens in class
or in exam is the teacher’s responsibility. Even students bluntly say to us that English is secondary; an average-oriented subject. (Liza, ESP TI)

She reported that in her own experience she tried to change the situation and stressed on how the personality of the teacher is so invaluable and that each language teacher has to have a strong character to survive the English course in the Medical Faculty with “minimum losses”.

Unfortunately I see low profile people, no personality and I wonder how they teach. I wonder how they deal with teachers. If I’m not very strong character they would have killed me or made a fool of me. I know stories of teachers being laughed at.

This view is also espoused by the Faculty management members. The Vice-Dean insisted on the need for having qualified language teachers with a medical background (UMI, 2). The Head of the English centre, a language teacher herself, also believes in the need for medical training courses for language teachers (Lama, UMI, 3).

More confidently, Razan showed her power and competence to impose her position as a tutor in the Medical Faculty who has rights as well as responsibilities. She narrated her experience and her philosophy to deal with such a complicated environment where language teachers are disrespected.

Sometimes they don’t respect the English teacher unless you impose your respect and ask for your rights and sometimes to be rude to an extent to get your rights especially in the medical faculty. The problem is that they marginalise you and at the same time they demand you to work more than what medical tutors do. They don’t respect us so we have to impose your respect. And on top of that they have a misconception about us and here lies the paradox that they view as ‘bad teachers’ regardless of what we do really do in the classroom. They have a perception that they are the best people. (Razan, ESP TI)

Summary

This chapter was devoted to presenting my findings that emerged in response to my first two research questions; the complex foreign language issues from theory to practice from the testimony of teachers, medical students, and medical doctors. It was found that ESP teachers are qualified teachers and up-to-date, familiar with recent teaching methodologies but there is a huge gap between them, students, and school officials and other higher policy makers. The policy/practice gap is profoundly indicated, absence of
any communication or dialogues seems to explain one element of complex chaotic English teaching and learning situation at Tishreen University. Based on data generated, many factors seem to have been at interplay in the way English is taught in this Faculty. The transmission pedagogy, class size restrictions, exam-oriented nature of English courses, syllabus, students’ ambivalent attitude and perceptions of the English courses inside university, ESP/Specialist dichotomous distinction in qualification also seem to have impacted in an negative way on students and teachers. Students appear to have no agency in their learning inside university. The overriding purpose for learning English in the 21st century needs further exploring as the learners needs seem no longer as oversimplistic as the way ESP has addressed it. Rather, there seems to be various pragmatic reasons for learning English in the present era as was clear in the self-motivated English learning activities they did. It was also evident that teachers seem to have struggles and power-related issues within institutions such as their marginalisation in the Medical School by both management bodies and students. This chapter also reported on key themes of utmost interest to learning ESP/EMP, from a professional point of view, in Tishreen University which go beyond pedagogical concerns to include aspects of the politics of English, power and identity. Here, the notion of “need” is problematised as it is no longer tied up with meeting linguistic and communicative needs. Rather, it is bound with the profession, with belonging to a professional community; to become a doctor. Students’ and teachers’ responses to the role English plays and the extent the dominance or hegemony of English is a most importantly constituent of construction of the doctor identity. Data from informants demonstrated the inevitable power/dominance of English, manifested in their own academic and profession lives notwithstanding its impact on their perceptions of the doctor “self” or “identity”. Students provided different perspectives in their resistance to taking one position and thus showed that English constitutes part of their identity construction without the fear of the loss of Arab identity symbolised in their close attachment role Arabic takes in their academic and professional and social nationalist lives. In the following chapter, the issues which emerged from the data will be discussed in relation to key issues in ESP to understand the conflictive ESP situation in Tishreen University.
5. Introduction

In this chapter, I synthesise issues which this inquiry generated to develop my thinking about core concepts in English for Specific Purposes. The aim of this chapter, hence, is to theorise about the findings of the research and move towards an understanding of “problematic” ESP situations at Tishreen University. It demonstrates the complexity of learning English for Medical Purposes in a particular FL Syrian context and the need for a reconceptualisation of EMP that goes beyond boundaries of “mainstream” ESP. The emergent issues in relation to EMP at Tishreen University are represented first alongside a summary of the research key findings followed by a rehearsal of the research concerns. In order to understand the conflictive situation at Tishreen University, the findings are discussed under four sections: a) English language policy in Syria, b) English language policy in practice, c) EMP in an FL context: English for becoming a doctor, and d) reconceptualisation of EMP in Syria.

I begin the chapter with a representation of a complex set of issues which emerged from the data and which are interconnected elements of ESP/EMP at Tishreen University. I borrow Hoban’s (2002) metaphor of a spider’s web which “is consistent with complexity theory, because it acknowledges the connectedness and dynamic nature that can self-organise to a state of equilibrium” (Hoban, 2002: 38).
Since most of labels on the web diagram are self-explanatory and were rehearsed in the previous chapter, I will only gloss over these labels for brevity purposes. The analysis of the research findings led to the creation of this set of notions which are drawn from different theoretical areas in a foreign language context. The complexity does not necessarily mean it is impossible to understand EMP but it shows the interconnectedness and the dynamism of ESP/EMP having all elements interacting and influencing each other. As is the case with “mainstream” ESP, EMP draws on tools
from linguistics and applied linguistics in determining the linguistic learner needs. It is also an educational situation which is concerned with pedagogical issues. The spread of English and forces of globalisation also has its impact since the medical profession has an international dimension in which English is a main ingredient. As in other cases where research of identity is concerned, many studies draw on social theory from sociology to analyse identity. In an EMP context, issues of status and habitus in relation to the doctor identity are tied up with learning English, too. What is special in reference to the present study is the impact forces of Arab nationalism on foreign language policy and arabisation of medicine alongside Arabic as a medium of instruction. Finally, a key finding confirms the need for more participation in the professional world in communities of practice of the professions. All the above issues are in dynamic influential relationship in the context of the study which show some aspects of complexity of ESP in a foreign language context and the need for considering EMP as a system that acknowledges what is not yet present to us as applied linguists, ESP practitioners and teachers. Discussion of the findings are summarised next.

5.1 Summary of research key findings

To begin with the research findings, one key finding was that of a language policy/practice gap wherein Syria’s language policy maintained the home language and encouraged the learning of foreign languages (mainly English and English for Specific Purposes in particular). The age at which English is currently studied in Syrian primary schools is year 1 and English has fundamentally been recently upgraded to become a prerequisite for government employment, academia promotion and gaining tenure, scholarships etc. As illustrated earlier in 3.3.4. ESP has been highly promoted since 2006, ESP teachers are being trained in MA and PhD programmes in UK institutions and ESP textbooks are being studied more than previously as they are more available in bookstores at present. However, the introduction of content subject teaching in English and the emphasis on ESP teaching can be understood as an unfair decision. Based on students’ negative experiences of studying medical subjects in English in year 3, there were issues related to the low level of the students’ English proficiency and lack of planning and preparation. This response to change could be argued as expected considering that English is taught as a foreign language in the school curriculum and apparently there has not been enough exposure to English before university entry. Most
importantly, ESP is introduced but there is no reference in the language policy documents to EAP or any awareness, on the part of students and faculty management, of what specific purposes English is taught. A related finding was that of the secondary status of English in the medical curriculum with a great deal of mistrust of these English courses and prioritisation of medical subjects. However, Syrian students opt for English medium and criticise the policy of arabisation of medicine as the driving reason for the double effort they have to go through while reading English and Arabic medical texts. They appeared aware of their need of English in medical studies and practice. Students’ testimonies illustrate that a strong belief in English emerges which, arguably, problematic technical issues of arabisation of medicine has contributed to its construction. This strong favour of English is manifested in students’ self-motivated learning activities outside the university driven by several “needs”; learning for various individual purposes that have no link to academic success at university and which suggest that the English they study at university is an “English for Exam Purposes”.

Language policy is never politics-free, and the Syrian case is not an exception. Arabic is maintained but from a one-sided decision as there is a clear lack of coordination between policy makers, students and ESP teachers in the institutions. Hence, at the surface of it, issues of teaching ESP may appear flawless but another finding from practice suggests that there exists an obvious form of resistance of English offered by the university for several reasons, such as the mistrust of the courses, ESP teachers’ disqualification, “norms” enforced by the faculty management members within the Medical Faculty of English as being a secondary subject in the medical curriculum. This finding was that of students’ resistance to the pointless English courses inside the university terminating all efforts ESP teachers have taken to deliver the ESP courses. Although they opt for oppressive learning inside university, students were keen on engaging in self-motivated learning activities for diverse purposes. This resistance is bound with ambivalent views towards English as a medium of instruction (EMI). Informants can be seen as provoked to discuss the issue of English as a language of instruction although this is not the scope of the research. It was their top discussed story when they were first asked to participate in my research on the topic of learning English for Medical Purposes. If this to indicate anything, it can suggest that ambivalent views towards EMI is created by the country’s long tradition of teaching medicine in Arabic. Students are reported to have struggled because the burden is doubled on them to study
in both languages (i.e., Arabic and English) regardless whether English is required for exams or not.

Finally, the role of English is essential for the status and identity of the contemporary Syrian medical identity. With the idealised view of what English represents to the Syrian medical students and tutors, a question is raised to what extent the power/ or the high status English takes over in constructing the medical identity. It was also clear that the power of English in the medicine field and the power of medicine itself eventually contribute to the way ESP/EMP teachers are marginalised in the institution. A dual identity was reported in students’ testimonies; having a medical identity tied up with learning English, and another Syrian Arab identity of which they demonstrate a high sense. In other words, learning English for the cases studied turned out to be “part of learning to become a doctor”. With the medical knowledge English co-constructs the medical identity through the students’ aspiration to gain recognition and belong to the regional (Arab) and the international medical community, which unquestionably interact in the medium of English.

The summary leads me now to narrow down the issues represented in Figure 18 and discuss the major findings of this study in the light of the conceptual framework to respond to my main research questions. Research concerns are restated in this section before delving into the detailed accounts of discussion.

1- How is English language teaching and learning positioned within a university curriculum informed by Arab nationalist language policy in the globalised context? (Language policy, ESP goals, pedagogy and/or curriculum)

2- What are students’ experiences of learning the English language (English for Medical Purposes/EMP) within the university curriculum?

3- What are the issues involved in learning ESP/EMP, from a professional point of view, in Tishreen University?

5.2 English language policy compromise

There are a number of language-related issues which had been referred to earlier in Chapter 3 which reveal a strong sense of Arab nationalism alongside the emphasis on teaching foreign languages. The findings of the present study confirm this attitude, but
indicate that the arabisation of medicine policy has made an impact on the Syrian doctor and that the demand for ESP since 2006 could be a compromise. This brings me back to the promotion of ESP itself, since its infancy, as an economically and politically-driven discipline. This aspect of politics of English, mainly in the critical applied linguistics literature, has been debatable for a long time since the Phillipson’s (1992) ground-breaking book “linguistic imperialism” which was influential in turning attention to the ways in which policies and practices are related to political and ideological agendas.

> The dominance of English asserted and maintained by the establishment and continuous reconstitution of structural (material properties) and cultural (ideological properties) inequalities between English and other languages. (ibid: 47)

According to Crystal (1997), the spread of English has never been viewed as neutral and was associated with issues of power. The features of English as the language of the former British colonies and the current American hegemony are what give English the status of domination.

> British political imperialism had sent English around the globe, during the nineteenth century, so that it was a language ‘on which the sun never sets’. During the twentieth century, this world presence was maintained and promoted almost single-handedly through the economic supremacy of the new American superpower. Economics replaced politics as the chief driving force. And the language behind the US dollar was English. (Crystal, 1997/2003:10)

> “Linguistic imperialism” was taken further to unpick the inherent politics of English (for example, Holliday, 1994, 2005; Pennycook, 1994, 1998, 2001; Phillipson & Skutnabb-Kangas, 1995, 1996; Canagarajah, 1999; Jenkins, 2000; Phillipson, 2003, 2009a, 2009b; and Ricento 2006). Canagarajah (1999:41) called for a move towards “resistance and appropriation of English”. Pennycook (2001), in his turn, challenged the “global English” and viewed it as a myth and argued that “English is inextricably bound up with the world: English is in the world and the world is in English” (2001:78). He called applied linguists to be “suspicious of the claims that the spread of English is natural, neutral or beneficial” (ibid: 83). Although Phillipson provided a massive structure of linguistic imperialism, Pennycook contended that “we cannot reduce language spread to an imperialism parallel to economic or military imperialism” as his interest lies in getting at the effects of this spread on people’s daily lives (ibid: 84). So he took up the “discourse imperialism” because it better captures the implications of the spread of English and its connection with international discourses. ELT, in his view, has
been dominated by western models and he called ELT practitioners and teachers and applied linguists to engage in critical pedagogy “to oppose the dominant discourses of the West and to help the articulation of counter-discourses in English” (ibid: 87).

In the Syrian case, the argument on linguistic imperialism is not fully related but there exist some aspects of the impact English has on political decisions in relation to foreign language teaching in a monolingual Arab country. Research in language policy has fashioned national policies in relation to “English as a global language” (Pavlenko & Norton, 2007: 672). Syria was a former French colony, a postcolonial context which “may take a neutral stance, neither privileging nor discouraging English (ibid). Although “statements about the global spread of English and its increasing socio-economic importance in the world have almost become clichés” (Lin, 2001:271), the findings suggest that the narrative of the “global village” and “global English” has a high impact in the present time on Syrian medical students and practitioners in the “information society” where “the entire internationalisation process is skewed in favour of native speakers of English and their cultures” (Phillipson, 2008: 20).

ESP is one example of the promotion of the language globally as a “commodity” since its infancy as illustrated in Chapter 1 in the historical perspective of ESP. Syria was not a British colony so English cannot be mainly associated with language of the colonialism. However, considering the country’s high sense of Arab nationalism with all its accompanying acts of translation and arabisatation could be attempts to maintain a compromising attitude towards English while keeping up with the pace of advancement in technology and communication which are mainly western-monopolised. English is a commodity as it has always been especially during the boom of ESP in the Gulf Oil rich countries. English is dominated and hegemonic but is not necessarily colonial. Rather, it is politically driven for development purposes at the national level in the Syrian context. This does not undermine the global political and ideological forces which have an influential role in the spread of English. Fishman (1996; 2006), contrary to advocates of the Phillipson’s theory, argued that the spread of English as a global language involves “non-Phillipsonian planning” (2006: 324). He opposed the claim of planned American hegemony of English as “the United States may not mean to do so, and it may not actually be involved in a conspiracy (as some would claim) to kill off the world’s languages, but the consequences may very well be the same, regardless of whatever its conscious motivation may be” (ibid).
As part of the national reform in Syria since 2001, there was a shift to lower the age of compulsory English input in school curriculum. *What is the best age to start teaching English?* is a common policy question which is difficult to answer due to its multi-faceted nature that includes the social, political, and educational. It is a phenomenon “evident in the Arab World where there is a dire need to bridge the digital divide” (Troudi, 2007:17) and the increasing demand for ESP can be attributed to what Hadley (2004) describes as a “disturbing growth of American influence around the world”:

> This informal empire both explicitly rewards and implicitly threatens those living in nations of the expanding circle, depending upon their mastery of the English language and their conformity to Anglo-American cultural norms. Rewards often come in the form of greater access to political, economic and cultural power. Threats range from economic marginalisation to cultural isolation. (ibid: 2)

With the rise of nation states after middle ages it is common to see nationalism as common sense. To maintain Arab nationalism, Syria has been successful in its persistence to keep Arabic as medium of instruction. Promoting FL teaching is the middle way option upon the realisation that we live in an interconnected world and Arabic on its own will not be enough. Although nationalist in its nature, foreign language policy in Syria as illustrated in Chapter 2 was not able to avoid the impact of globalisation since 2001. Placing foreign language teaching development (English mainly) in the wider national reform process in 2001 is a response to social development which “implies greater far-reaching participant benefits including an equitable sharing of resources and a distribution of socio-political and economic power and influence” (Kennedy, 2011:25). Language policy itself is social and development planning rather than providing mechanistic solutions to problems (Tupas, 2009) and politics has been at the heart of work in language policy; determination of languages of instruction is a political decision (Tollefson, 1991; Ricento, 2006).

Hence, as far as the Syrian ideology and politics are concerned, it is common sense to adhere to national language, preserve mother tongue in education. However, the top down foreign language policy, the centralised control on language and the lack of any organisation that provide advice on language issues in Syria makes it sound that language policy is disconnected from practice. This is the policy-practice gap; an issue which may suggest linguistic ignorance on the part of language policy and the far distance from teachers and students and their needs and roles. The top innovations drafted by politicians and policy planners and makers do not mean they are aware of the
real social needs of the community. Usually they do not pay much attention to applied linguistics and LP (Kennedy, 2011:27) as they have little impact. Students, practitioners and management have no awareness of what EMP, ESP, EFL, EIL mean (Al-Rubaie, 2010 in a Kuwaiti context), which is expected, given that they are neither linguists nor language practitioners. According to students, there is one form of English which is the global English myth they have in their heads and which is manifested through their quest to master it. In this study, Syrian medical students’ perceptions and attitudes towards English show how complex it is to understand the role of foreign language learning in students’ communities, whether in schools or professional communities. Therefore, more attempts should be made to bridge the gap between politicians and LPs since the LA is a political process. The lack of impact could be due to the nature of dealing with human being issues like language which encompasses attitudes and beliefs of individuals and cannot be reduced to mechanistic tangible solutions as is the case with high-stakes professions such as medicine (Kaplan & Baldauf, 2007).

Although Global English, as a new form of ESP that focuses on international domains, is threatened by other major languages challengers such as Mandarin, Hindu-Urdu and “-perhaps most presciently – Arabic” (Graddol, n.d: 2), an emerging higher status and role of English is being noticed in Syria. The politically-informed policy rhetoric seems to determine the foreign language to be taught and the amount of exposure to it without any consultation with applied linguists, language policy expertise, language teachers and students. The issue is more complex and cannot be reduced to one solution of having Arabic medium instruction alongside the emphasis on teaching foreign languages including the demand for ESP. The effect of these language policies in the Syrian context are discussed next.

5.3 **English language policy in practice**

Although medical tutors, university management, ESP teachers and medical students belong to different communities, one key finding is that they all share the same views, with different emphasis, with regards to the significant role of English in medicine. Medical faculty management personnel defended the university’s policy with their high demand on ESP teachers to obtain medical knowledge to enable them for better teaching of English in the medical faculty. Medical lecturers supported English medium instruction in medicine and the majority of medical students showed preference for
English despite the fact that they resisted English offered in the university. Studies on medium of instruction in the Arabian Gulf States concluded that “English is seen as symbol for technology and modern life, travel and employment, while Arabic is educationally marginalised and is seen to represent tradition, religion and, even worse, backwardness” (Habbash, 2011) (see also Findlow, 2006; Al-Rubaie, 2010; Troudi & Jendli, 2011). Although students in my study did not bluntly voice this distinction between English and Arabic, they tended to prefer English due to several factors among which is what Troudi and Jendli (2011) referred to as “the quality of education the students received in their schools and their language ability and overall comfort with Arabic” (ibid: 44). In my study, translation and arabisation of medicine appeared to be very influential factors in the preference for English in medicine. The authorised status of Arabic which requires the use of Arabic texts as sources of information in the university seems to have created a heavy burden on medical students who prefer English medical textbooks. Criticism made by students about the university Arabic medical textbooks grounded in the these books are dated and heavy with Arabic medical terminology which are “arabised”, hard to memorise, and unshared by any other Arab doctors in the medical arena in the Arab region.

In Syria, no one disputes the use of Arabic at the local social level but the issue is raised at the institutional level when medical students have to take compulsory courses in English. It was observed that English is contested inside the university but not in the wider society as most university students take private English courses outside university during term times. English inside the university in the high prestige medical faculty in particular, could be seen as a battleground in which students use all their manoeuvring techniques to find their ways through the English subject (General English, EMP, and content English subject). Students at university in the adult world have become very conscious of what they study and they seem to resist the English courses unlike when they were in school. It appears that students, behind the scenes, are inducted in the ESP programme but they act on that and take courses outside university. Hence, it could be argued that ESP in Tishreen University seems to have created a new set of counterproductive circumstances as we witness students’ resistance, dissatisfaction and demotivation.

As Spolsky (2004:11) argues, “an explicit language policy does not guarantee that it will be implemented, nor does implementation guarantee success”. Best policy does not necessarily lead to best practice, codifying standards and execution of policies as
apparent in the findings in this study do nothing but contribute to the creation of a problem; a conflict, a contested situation. ESP is not proposed for exam purposes. The university is failing the students and the students are smart and they find their ways. Here lies the gap between the rhetoric of the university and the reality. The gap is between the rhetoric of the university (formal teaching /what they should learn) and the reality (reality/what they want to do). The policy is suppressing progress in medical academic and professional worlds. Regionally, everybody speaks English even Arabs themselves. From students’ testimony, translation and arabisation make Syrians feel out of step in the region. In other words, this policy for the students, tutors and ESP teachers is “useless”.

Why do the students show resistance to the official curriculum? It could be argued that students resist because they are intelligent and spotted that the university English courses are distant from their aspired or imagined ones. The system’s constraints including assessment/ exam-mania (marks), the traditional rote repetition transmission pedagogy, the teaching model, heavy medical curriculum, and mistrust in English learning inside formal state-provided courses, to mention a few, all contribute as factors for resisting English inside university. The Syrian education system is what Kalantzis & Cope classify as didactic with structural approaches, teacher control, transmission pedagogy and unitarity of learners (Kalantzis & Cope, 2008). Not to ignore that the ELT discipline, as Pennycook argues, has invited to an “ever-increasing trivialisation of learning and learners” through the over-emphasis on the pure functional purpose of language learning in the classroom (1990:13).

However, there are other issues which could be inferred from students’ conceptions about English and its high value and the high status it confers upon the contemporary Syrian doctor. Language learning is tied up with occupation; the medical profession; with identity of becoming a doctor. Students do not seem to have negative attitudes towards English as a threat; it is viewed as a resource, and their learning drives of it do not match what the university provide in which they have no agency in the university curriculum. So, they tend to prefer English learning outside the formal state-provided courses in extra-curricular language/ private language schools where they show independent learning and agency.

English is there not necessarily colonial in the complex world we live in. The ESP complex system can be seen as part of the interconnected global system in which we see
dynamic interaction with communities. Hence, we need to account for the emergent world in which we see emergent changes of learner needs which, as this study showed, cannot be rigidly fixed. Pennycook (2007:5-6) put this best when he contended that English “cannot be usefully understood in modernist states-centric models of imperialism or world Englishes, or in terms of traditional, segregationist models of language”. Rather, he locates these Englishes within a more complex vision of globalisation that does not necessarily indicate similarities. This vision aims to understand the role of English both critically-in terms of new forms of power, control and destruction-and in its complexity-in terms of new forms of power of resistance, change, appropriation and identity. It suggests that we need to move beyond arguments about homogeneity or heterogeneity, or imperialism and nation states, and instead focus on translocal and transcultural flows. English is a translocal language, a language of fluidity and fixity that moves across, while becoming embedded in, the materiality of localities and social relations. English is bound up with transactional flows, a language of imagined communities and refashioning identities. (ibid)

5.4 EMP in an FL context: English for becoming a doctor

Taking the above quote of Pennycook on English as an embodiment of threat, desire, destruction and opportunity, Paltridge & Starfield (2011: 117) note that these issues are evident among non-native speakers in the emergent global community of English lingua franca who “reshape English for their own purposes”. They alert that this area is growing rapidly and only recently little pedagogical implications have been drawn and that “practitioners and researchers will need to not lose sight of the individual learners whose multiple purposes are shaping and being shaped by the power of English”. This idea of “reshaping English for own purposes” is the focus of the next section.

In order to understand the nature of EMP in Tishreen University, in this section I discuss and interrogate the construct “purposes” in English for Specific Purposes based on medical students’ accounts of what role English as a foreign language has in their lives. In the course of discussion, influential concepts from SLA research (motivation vs. investment), anthropological theories of learning (situated learning and community of practice), and sociology (field, habitus, and capital) are used to discuss the purpose for learning English for Medical Purposes in the studied ESP situation at Tishreen University.
5.4.1 Investment in contrast with motivation

One finding of the study was that medical students are demotivated to learn English as a course in the medical curriculum. However, they sought and participated in self-motivated learning activities outside the confines of the university. This activity is what Peirce (1995) constructs as “investment” which is a problematisation of the concept of motivation dominant in the field of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) (Gardner & Lambert, 1972 and Gardner, 1985); which is divided into the instrumental motivation in which a language learner learns a second language for utilitarian purposes, such as employment, and the integrative motivation where learners desire to integrate successfully with the target language community. Peirce contended that this understanding of motivation fails to “capture the complex relationship between relations of power, identity, and language learning” and “presupposes a unitary, fixed, and ahistorical language learner who desires access to material resources that are the privilege of target language speakers” (1995: 17). Her proposed notion of “investment” extends beyond language learner motivation to account for the complexity of the relationship between language learners and the target language that are believed to have “a complex social identity and multiple desires” (ibid: 17). In other words, the communication process between language learners and target language speakers involves more than simply a language exchange. Rather, learners “are constantly organising and re-organising a sense of who they are and how they relate to the social world” (ibid: 18).

This concept, through years of research by Norton and others continued to challenge the view of language learners in SLA motivation research as “having a unified, coherent identity which organizes the type and intensity of a language learner’s motivation. […] investments are intimately connected to the ongoing production of the learners’ identities and their desires for the future” (Norton, 2000:120). Medical students in this study seem to have perceptions of the value and power of English in a Syrian doctor’s life regardless whether they are currently using the language at present or not.

Nonetheless, they all have these ideas about being part of an international “imagined community” of medical professionals. This is evident in their eagerness to join other medical doctors working in the international medicine arena who use English as the medium of communication whether in the Arab region (for example Lebanon, Arabian Gulf States, Egypt) or across the globe. Their quest could be driven by discourses of
Anglicisation which represents the US English-speaking countries as tied with power in technology and medicine. Although only a number of student participants had the chance to engage with the international medical community, perceptions of the majority about doctors in English-speaking countries are partially constructed through their eagerness to actively become a member of that community. This desire is the golden opportunity that each Syrian doctor will probably look forward to and this justifies their investment in English to reach their target or purpose. Syrian medical students stressed that their preference to study medicine in English is pragmatic and should not necessarily be interpreted as a threat to Arabic. Rather, it could be understood as Norton & Kamal (2003:314) put it, “from a geopolitical and historical perspective… [to] reflect the desire of a country in a postcolonial world to engage with the international community from a position of strength rather than weakness” . Norton & Kamal reiterate Canagarajah’s (1999) idea of resistance and appropriation of English in postcolonial communities on the periphery and suggest that it “does not necessarily compromise identities structured on the grounds of linguistic or religious affiliation” (ibid). Therefore, as far as medicine is concerned, resistance to ESP courses is coupled with a high level of investment in English through though self-motivated learning because of the link they established between English and their view of the medical ‘self’.

Discussion of investment in language learning in this study is best exploited in relation to identity which is a core theme of analysis in this study. Before expanding on the identity issue in detail, I bring in Dörnyei’s (2005) ‘L2 Motivational Self System’ framework, which concurs with the imagined identity, and which is made of three components:

1- **Ideal L2 Self**, which is the L2-specific facet of one’s ‘ideal self’: If the person we would like to become speaks an L2, the ‘ideal L2 self’ is a powerful motivator to learn the L2, because of the desire to reduce the discrepancy between our actual and ideal selves.

2- **Ought-to L2 Self**, which concerns the attributes that one believes one ought to possess to meet expectations and to avoid possible negative outcomes.

3- **L2 Learning Experience**, which concerns situated, ‘executive’ motives related to the immediate learning environment and experience (e.g. the impact of the teacher, the curriculum, the peer group, the experience of success).

(Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2009:29)

The cases of medical students studied demonstrated having the three layers of the medical “self”. The majority of them described the doctor with high proficiency in
English as distinct from the monolingual doctor and they idealised the character of this doctor as someone they look up to. Those in advanced years of study (years 4, 5 & 6), who held higher degrees of awareness to the contribution of English to developing the medical self, seemed to have internalised some assumptions about what a good doctor has to acquire in order to have a successful academic and professional life. As data revealed, English is unquestionably component of the *ought-to L2 self*. As for the L2 learning experience, students across different years of study demonstrated a third layer of the “self” which is concerned with their immediate programme outcomes driven by their one and only motive; that is passing exams with high marks regardless of the quality of L2 they are being taught. This attitude could be understood as response on the students’ part to the secondary status pertained to English in the university, the stereotypes about English and ESP teachers in the university, which students may have constructed themselves, and enhanced by some other negative perceptions about their university language learning experience.

### 5.4.2 Belonging to and legitimate peripheral participation (LPP) in imagined medical communities of practice

In order to understand the relationship between learning and identity, the influential theories of imagination and learning developed by Wenger (1998) which focus on the relationship between imagination and identity, can best help understand how Syrian medical students view English as part of the process of becoming a member of the international medical community. Findings of the study suggest that medical students view English learning as part of the practice of the medical community (real or imagined) in their university education. They demonstrated their extended learning objectives that go, or link them to broader communities beyond the confines of the university to include participation in the wider medical community, whether at the regional or international level. The study also revealed that ESP courses were limited in the way they were delivered which remained within clearly defined curriculum boundaries. Therefore, their resistance to EMP courses can be understood in that EMP courses are distant from what medical students expect in their medical practice. That highlights the failure of ESP to link between students’ classroom world and the imagined community of medical practice in which English is the gatekeeper. In a high-stakes profession such as medicine, a high level of participation in practice is expected and students seem to be aware of the “community of practice”, the community of
practitioners which is what they wish to belong to. The concept of “community of practice” was developed Lave and Wenger (1991) as their path-breaking analysis of learning in their model of situated learning (Lave, 1993; Wenger, 1999, 2002). Communities of practice are everywhere around us, at home, in the neighbourhood, in workplaces and educational institutions etc. in which human beings engage in shared interest activities and are core or peripheral members in the margin. Human beings interact with each other and with the world, and we tune our relations with each other and with the world accordingly. According to Wenger (2006), three aspects of community of practice are:

**The domain:** A community of practice is not merely a club of friends or a network of connections between people. It has an identity defined by a shared domain of interest. Membership therefore implies a commitment to the domain, and therefore a shared competence that distinguishes members from other people.

**The community:** In pursuing their interest in their domain, members engage in joint activities and discussions, help each other, and share information. They build relationships that enable them to learn from each other.

**The practice:** A community of practice is not merely a community of interest - people who like certain kinds of movies, for instance. Members of a community of practice are practitioners. They develop a shared repertoire of resources: experiences, stories, tools, ways of addressing recurring problems - in short a shared practice. This takes time and sustained interaction.

In the modern Syrian medical practice, despite that medicine is taught and practised in Arabic, it was found in the study that English is perceived as part of learning to become a member of the medical community. As they are still learning as “new comers” to the community of practitioners, students aspire to participate in medical practice though using English that allows them access to full participation, “action and connection” (Wenger, 1998:55) and gradually become “old-timers”. This process in situated learning is called “legitimate peripheral participation” which provides a way to speak about the relations between new-comers and old-timers, and about activities, identities, artefact, and communities of knowledge and practice. It concerns the process by which new-comers become part of a community of practice. A person’s intention to learn is engaged and the meaning of learning is configured through the process of becoming a full participant in socio-cultural practice. This social process includes, indeed it subsumes, the learning of knowledgeable skills. (Lave & Wenger, 1991:29)
“Mainstream” ESP which is being adopted in Tishreen University could be argued to have a limited view of learning which does not account for the importance of situated learning with its two core claims that are closely linked to the discussion of the missing link in the ESP course provided at university and the imagined courses students designed to express their view of what EMP courses should be like. Firstly, “social practice is the key to grasping the actual complexity of human thought as it takes place in real life” (Wenger, 1998:281) and secondly; practice as being a central construct in conceptualisation of learning in communities, “practice is about meaning as an experience of everyday life” (ibid:52, author’s emphasis).

Communities of practice may be “as broad as a society or culture, or as narrow as a particular language classroom” (Lantolf & Pavlenko, 2001:148), it may be a real or ‘imagined community’ which is “groups of people not immediately tangible and accessible, with whom we connect through the power of imagination” (Kanno & Norton, 2003:241). In Tishreen University, students appear to have imagined belonging to the international medical community, which they may not have met in real life but have identified shared practice that require transcending boundaries and get connected with. Imagination is part of the identity construction process (Anderson, 1983, Hall, 1990). Anderson proposed this idea of ‘imagined communities’ in his definition of a nation as a political imagined community whose members may not know other fellow members or do not even hear about them (Anderson, 2006:7).

The concept of “imagined community”, as Norton notes, “can elucidate issues concerning language, identity, and education that have been recognised as important but for which we have limited research evidence” (Kanno & Norton, 2003:242). Her work centred on the relational view of imagined communities to “investment” in communities of practice to extend her work in second language context (e.g., language and identity of immigrant women in Canada) (2000, 2001). Her focal conclusions from the study can help understand the resistance observed in Tishreen University to the English courses offered by the university:

When language learners begin a program of instruction, they may be invested in communities that extend beyond the four walls of the classroom. If the language teacher does not validate these imagined communities of the learner, students may resist participation in learning…. a learner’s imagined community invites an imagined identity, and a learner’s investment in the target language must be understood within this context. (Kanno & Norton, 2003:242)
The study findings suggest perceptions of English as a component of the future doctor identity in an internationalised profession. Medical students’ recurrent reference, unconsciously, to English language learning as a main ingredient of becoming a doctor could imply an awareness of Lave and Wenger’s view of learning. This “implies becoming a different person with respect to the possibilities enabled by these systems of relations […] [and] involves the construction of identities. [They] conceive of identities as long-term, living relations between persons and their place and participation in communities of practice”. Thus, identity, knowing, and social membership entail one another” (Lave & Wenger, 1991:53). While feeling behind studying medicine in Arabic and being aware of what English contributes to the construction of the doctor profile, students show implicitly stated awareness that learning English for medical purposes should involve participation in a community of practice (i.e. legitimate peripheral participation, LPP). Rather than looking at language for medical purposes as reduced to the “specific language”, vocabulary, grammar and structure, the purpose can be different from being “functional” to “what is being a doctor?” and “where does English fit in that identity?”. Hence, what matters to students is how to get the contemporary Syrian doctor identity through LPP in the international community of practice. Participation, as Wenger notes:

refers not just to local events of engagement in certain activities with certain people, but to a more encompassing process of being active participants in the practices of social communities and constructing identities in relation to these communities. (Wenger, 1999: 4)

The case in Tishreen University extends beyond just moving from the “novice” stage to become more competent and engage in social processes of a specific community so they move from legitimate peripheral participation to into “full participation” which “is intended to do justice to the diversity of relations involved in varying forms of community membership” (Lave & Wenger 1991: 37). At the local level, not only that those students appear aware of the international dimension of medicine and the need for participation in the wider medical community, but they also developed an understanding of the competitiveness with other Syrian students, in particular those who study medicine in English (i.e. in private universities). The reference to other peers could be understood as an attempt to show their equal abilities and participate in the smaller medicine community (English-medium medical faculties) and desire to develop the future medical identity on equal grounds through preference of English as a medium of instruction.
5.4.3 English and the Syrian doctor identity

As for the fluid and hybrid nature of identity, Syrian medical students appeared highly proud of their Arab national identity. However, discrepancy was found which indicates the fluid multiple identities of medical students in a foreign language learning context. Students at Tishreen University are proud of their Arab identity but stressed that their desire to become a future modern Syrian doctor is tied up with learning English. Not to mention that enhancing Syrian doctor’s prestige is one reason for improving English proficiency. Although they are proud of their Arab national identity but their construction of their doctor identity is based on English as an essential component of the medical knowledge they acquire. Their future vision of the medical “self” seems to be a response to forces of globalisation or internationalisation of medicine which eliminate boundaries among medical practitioners worldwide and therefore extend communication and interconnectedness with international medical practitioners, influencing and getting influenced by them. As Wenger (2000) puts it,

…identity extends in space, across boundaries. It is neither unitary nor fragmented. It is an experience of multimebership, an intersection of many relationships that you hold into the experience of being a person, at once one and multiple. It is not something we can turn on and off. (Wenger, 2000: 241-242)

Identity-related issues, of the role of English in the becoming a doctor in Syria, can be best analysed and discussed within a Bourdieuan’ approach to understanding the social world. It was found that medical students at Tishreen University hold strong congruent views of English as a capital which will allow for the construction of the doctor identity. The use of the word “capital” cannot go unexplored as it turned out that language (English), learning and identity (doctor identity) are three central constructs to the argument of this thesis. Why do we learn a language? The view of language as was revealed in the data, aligns with the poststructuralist thoughts of language and power of Bourdieu’s (1991) view of language as capital. Bourdieu’s theory from sociology offers three concepts, field, capital, and habitus which are relevant to this study and which help understanding the resistance students have demonstrated towards university English courses. His trio constructs of field, habitus and capital are most relevant “thinking tools” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1989:50) in analysing the case of medical students’ perceptions of English and its coinage with power and identity.
Field is the ‘social space’ in which the interactions happen (Bourdieu, 2005:148). The simplest way to define field is by drawing on its analogy with a football field. There is a reference to social life by Bourdieu as a ‘game’: The social field is similar to a football field in a sense that both require a physical boundaried position which subsumes that limits are imposed on what can be done in the field, and that all that can be done will be shaped by the conditions of the field. Like in a football game, different social agents deploy various multiple strategies to improve their position in the field (Thomson, 2008:68-69). The construct which is closely linked to identity is habitus which is defined as

a property of social agents that comprises “structured and structuring structure” (Bourdieu,1994:170) it is “structured” by one’s past and present circumstances, such as family upbringing and educational experience. It is “structuring” in that it is systematically ordered rather than random or unpatterned. This “structure” comprises a system of dispositions which generate perceptions, appreciations and practices (1990:3, cited in Maton, 2008:51)

At the heart of habitus structuring is the family which subsequently influences schools and further experiences “from restructuring to restructuring” (Bourdieu, 1972, cited in Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992: 134). Medical students’ habitus in this study is reflected in the way English language learning inside university is devalued and becomes secondary to the private self-motivated English language learning, but within the field of medicine it is highly valued. Those students who have high value dispositions are seen more likely to take advantage of the capital and have more gains in the medicine faculty and in the wider medical community. Due to their internalised dispositions, they need a new habitus that aligns with their expectations in which English is a capital. Habitus in the field of university is not the same as their habitus in the field of medicine and this explains their ambivalent attitudes towards English in and outside university. The issue of status extends beyond the Syrian society as many developing countries have been degraded to secondary status (Robertson, 1992) due to the major economic and scientific power of “the west”. Students in this study showed awareness to being at a lower status as far as development in science is concerned. In order to be members of the imagined medical community, students need English, ‘the passport’ to that world using the English-dominant internet technology. This does not leave a negative impact as Canagarajah’s (1999) research suggests, since English language is being appropriated here for development purposes. In this study, not only students have alerted to the need for English as an access to knowledge (a passport) and for their professional
development (Habbash, 2011, Al-Jarf, 2008; Troudi & Jendli, 2001; Al-Rubaie, 2010),
but also tutors were keen to express how English is the most widely used foreign
societies have parallel difficulties in publishing research, both in journals and in books
with international publishers, while local options for publishing are often restricted”

Research which is published in developed countries is often out of reach for
scholars in developing societies, whose own resources may be limited, and
whose institutions may not have the budget to acquire expensive books or
journals. Although the Budapest Open Access Initiative and similar schemes
are laudable international efforts to make research in all academic fields
freely available on the Internet, most open-source online publications enjoy
lower prestige than the established academic journals. (Suber, 2011 cited in
Bolton et al, 2011:475)

However, as Coleman’s argues, “English undoubtedly plays a major role in various
aspects of development. Nevertheless, it is important that we should not exaggerate the
importance of English nor should we undervalue the importance of other languages.”
(Coleman 2010: 16).

Reject outright the notion that English is always the necessary key to
economic development in development contexts, …[and alert to] the risk
that English may be used by elites for gatekeeping purposes, in particular to
control access to social advancement and economic and political power.
(Coleman 2011, in Bolton et al, 2011: 462)

The issue of status is part of habitus so I move in this section to highlight the high
status the Syrian society gives to medical doctors as opposed to language teachers. The
findings related to the marginalisation of ESP teachers in the Medical Faculty and the
inevitable comparison with subject specialists is never novel in the ESP literature. ESP
teachers talked of being treated as “outsiders” and trapped in the middle. In any
educational setting, students and teachers are at the heart of the learning and teaching
process. Hence, their role cannot be dimmed as they are the one to bridge the gap
between the two worlds—the ESP and the medicine professional world—which students
do not see as separate. ESP teachers are marginalised in the profession and in the
institution echoing the earlier acknowledged dilemma language teachers face in terms of
status given to them (Johns, 1990). Breen (2007) sums up the low status conferred upon
language teachers and language teaching profession which is positioned as
a “service” provision wherein teachers’ knowledge of the language is perceived as lacking the disciplinary status accorded to the expertise of specialists in conventional subject departments. Many highly experienced teachers of EFL in their own countries are subject to different contractual arrangements compared with other teachers and are often required to undertake more than one job to make ends meet. However significant their classroom and prior teacher education experience, they frequently need to obtain higher academic qualifications in order to attain both career mobility and a more secure contractual position. (Breen, 2007: 1072).

The third construct of relevance is the theory of capital. Capital, in Bourdieu’s term, is broader than the economic capital; multi-dimensional in nature. Social capital is defined as,

the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance or recognition or in other words, membership in a group – which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectivity-owned capital, a ‘credential’ which entitles them to credit, in the various senses of the word. (Bourdieu 1986: 248-249)

Thompson (1991: 27) uses the metaphor of a game “with its own rules and conditions of entry” to illustrate the workings of the field. For example, professional politicians have to have a “practical sense or feel for the game that is a habitus attuned to the specific conditions of the political field”. Consequently, habitus can be operationalised as the students’ aspirations for their occupational future. Their agency in learning English inside university is constrained as they find themselves bound with an internalised set of constraints. They therefore seek another possibility of language learning with options which are closer to their aspired world in which English is a “must-learn” language.

5.5 Reconceptualisation of EMP in Syria: A possibility?

The “mainstream” linguistics-oriented approach to ESP, adopted in Tishreen University, which puts the language first in order to prepare medical students for real life medical practice does not seem to improve the EMP situation. If the premise of ESP is to prepare students to master the language of the profession (real world one), then students are expected to have a very authentic professional English course so that they are capable of using English in their medicine profession. In this research, students seem resistant to EMP courses although they are specialists and their teachers are
qualified ESP teachers with high degrees from British universities. Based on the research findings from a particular EMP situation in Tishreen University, the learning provided in this approach seems to place little importance on the role of foreign language learning in identity construction in the 21st century. Learning English for Medical Purposes, to the contemporary Syrian doctor is part of constructing the doctor identity as part of the international medical community of practice. Their pursuit of recognition by the international medical community is conditioned, in their views, upon their mastery of English. The power of medicine, status of doctors, value of English and their investment in it, all unveil that learning English is not just for medical purposes; it is learning English as part of becoming a doctor, a desire for future participation and action in the medicine profession through the powerful tool ‘English’. Hence, it may be time to go beyond looking at language for special purposes as reduced to language, vocabulary, and grammar. This notion has been critiqued long time ago by Hutchinson and Waters’ (1987) who argued for a radical new perspective. At that time this was against most traditional thinking in ESP and its emphasis on the specialised language to be learned, leaving the learning side secondary if not marginal. Although other attempts were made by ESP practitioners back in the 1980s to focus on the learning rather than just the language (for example, Harper's (1986) collective papers on ESP practitioners discovering problematic issues with the ESP programme at a Saudi University), “mainstream” ESP seems to have dominated with the rigid understanding of the “purpose” in EMP. The purpose of these specialised language courses is far more complex than the purely functional; it is ‘what is being a doctor? Where does English fit in that identity?’ Hence, part of identity is status, identity will confer status, and English is a major construct of the contemporary Syrian Arab doctor (i.e. part of becoming a doctor).

Summary

In this chapter, I identified a set of emergent themes in the findings to demonstrate the complexity of English for Medical Purposes in the Syrian context. Firstly, a brief account of the research findings was provided. Secondly; the findings were discussed under four broad themes to understand the main strands of “conflict” identified in the ESP situation in Tishreen University. The language policy compromise and distance from practice were discussed and led to discussion of the central argument of the thesis;
the emergent aspect of EMP in this particular FL context which is learning a foreign language as part of learning to become a doctor. Finally, a summary of key sections in the discussion is presented to speculate a reconceptualisation of EMP in Tishreen University.
CHAPTER SIX: IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE, NEW DIRECTIONS IN RESEARCH, AND CONCLUSIONS

6. Introduction

Having discussed the findings in the previous chapter, I draw an ESP/applied linguistics relationship as a “way forward” to rethink what I is proposed from this study as common problematic notions in the two fields of ESP and Applied Linguistics. Next, I provide an account of the study implications for pedagogy: for English language education and for ESP teachers. New directions in ESP research are then suggested. Finally, the thesis comes to a close with concluding remarks on the limitations of the study and a reflective conclusion on the thesis as a whole.

6.1 The ESP/Applied Linguistics relationship

In this section, I discuss the elements of the conflict in the ESP situation in Tishreen University to include four contentious issues I found often not closely attended to in the fields of ESP and the broader Applied Linguistics that may be contributors to reaching a dead end in research and practice. Sometimes the most straight-looking route does not lead to new territories but ultimately sends us round in wheels. ESP was inducted at Syrian universities, qualified teachers were appointed and ESP textbooks were provided, but resistance was apparent: ESP does not seem to have impact due to several factors of which I describe four in this section in an attempt to link ESP to Applied Linguistics (AL) based on what I find problematic similarities between the two disciplines. I purposefully refer to ESP in relation to AL, because of what I argue as the multidisciplinary in both disciplines. Although this study doesn’t have a linguistic element, ESP as a field does. My intention from the very beginning was not to focus on the language itself, because there is a large number of publications on linguistic analysis, discourse analysis etc. The link to applied linguistics is taken from its view of language teaching which has had its relationships with linguistic and psychology for years. Applied linguistics got involved in syllabus and test designs and “ventured into coursebook writing” deploying general ideas about learning influenced by theories ranging from structuralism, behaviourism, Chomskyan’s argument of the independence of learner’s language and communicative language teaching through to task-based
learning. (Cook & Wei, 2009:5-6). Here, I view ESP as applied linguistics as long as it is concerned with language teaching, because it has a theory of language and a language element (ibid: 5). In other words, I draw on aspects of post-structural theory and complexity theory to understand a language teaching situation beyond a fixed structure or the universalism of language rules.

6.1.1 Applied nature of the applied linguistics and ESP

In the review of the ESP history in Chapter 1, it was established that ESP started as a linguistically-based field as much as Applied Linguistics was and still is. However, linguistics and linguistic theories nowadays are barely mentioned in applied linguistics except for the work of Chomsky and to some extent Jackendoff:

…indeed some practitioners radiate hostility towards linguistics, preferring to draw on almost any other area. One cause may be that the enthusiastic selling of the 1980s generative model by its supporters led to the view that linguistics has nothing practical to contribute. (Cook & Wei, 2009:2-3)

While linguistic theories became ancillary, theories were derived for postmodernism, psychology or sociology (ibid). ESP itself was based on the dominant linguistic theories in its early days. However, later theories influenced the field including needs analysis, and critical approaches. According to Hyland (2007:391), “ESP draws its strength from an eclectic theoretical foundation and a commitment to research-based language education which seeks to reveal the constraints of social contexts on language use and the ways learners can gain control over these.” However, although ESP is research-based practice, findings from this study suggests that ESP like other ELT branches have little connection to practice which is seen as not working although ESP materials and qualified ESP teachers are offered. Hyland (2007) claims that ESP has had impact on language teaching, and research emphasised “a situated view of literacy and […] the applied nature of the field” (my emphasis). He goes on to argue that ESP “has encouraged teachers to highlight communication rather than language, to adopt a research orientation to their work, to employ collaborative pedagogies, to be aware of discourse variation, and to consider the wider political implications of their role” (ibid). However important or true these claims are, the concern with the specialised language needs and discourse genres take over communication as is evident in this research and will be discussed in point 3 in this section.
Both AL and ESP are applied in nature. Since its days in the dawn 1950s; the time of its founder Pit Corder, British applied linguistics has been defined as “the theoretical and empirical investigation of real-world problems in which language is a central issue” (Brumfit, 1995:27). Applied linguistics in Pit Corder's (1973:10) original formulation is:

The application of linguistic knowledge to some objects — or, applied linguistics, as its name implies — is an activity. It is not a theoretical study. It makes use of the findings of theoretical studies. The applied linguist is a consumer, or user, not a producer, of theories.

The broad definition of applied linguistics as problem-solving was certainly true in its early days (Cook & Wei, 2009: 1). The applied linguistics definition from the International Encyclopaedia of Linguistics reads as follows:

Whenever knowledge about language is used to solve a basic language-related problem, one may say that A[pplied] L[inguistics] is being practised. AL is a technology which makes abstract ideas and research findings accessible and relevant to the real world; it mediates between theory and practice. (Kaplan & Widdowson, 1992:76)

ESP is “unashamedly applied” drawing its strength from different theories that could inform the understanding of classroom practice (Hyland, 2007: 401). Similarly, AL is also a gap bridge between the linguistic theory and language practice. It is

an activity which seeks to identify, within the disciplines concerned with language and learning, those insights and procedures of enquiry which are relevant for the formulation of pedagogic principles and their effective actualisation in practice. (Widdowson, 1990:6)

The two fields aim at bridging the gap between theory and practice to a better effective pedagogy for practice through applying linguistic knowledge and research findings to the real world. Within a post-structural perspective of complexity theory, I argue that the “applied” in AL and ESP is contentious as far as this study is concerned. Application of linguistic theories or the application of ESP in Tishreen University did not lead to a “better”, more “effective” practice of English language learning. The word “applied”, hence, could be seen as limiting the understanding of research on human behaviour (language learning) to a mechanistic way in which “problems” are solved and “needs” are met and prescriptions are suggested. However important these issues are, they may not always be “effective” in the sense that the application of theories (linguistic or other) in practice will not always lead to successful outcomes. This leads
me now to discuss this “mechanistic” aspect in a broader “deterministic” nature of both the AL and ESP disciplines.

6.1.2 Deterministic nature

The purpose of this research is not to rehearse exhaustively findings and arguments of the publications in ESP but to find what is found problematic in it by drawing on some conceptual issues and combine it with concrete research. The central argument of the thesis centres around problematising the ESP approach and its primary focus on needs analysis. As illustrated in the review of ESP in the introduction Chapter 1, genre analysis and course design have been the main areas around which major ESP research was carried out. A critique of needs already exists in the literature of ESP (see Chapter 1) but has not been given much attention. Findings of the study can add up to this notion of critique (problematisation) through illustrating the complexity of determining what EMP is actually for. “Needs” cannot be predetermined as happens in practice through the deterministic approach ESP takes which presupposes learners’ needs to design commercial ESP textbooks which some countries adopt without questioning on the base that they are imported from native English-speaking countries.

Talking of “needs”, this study shows some of the learner’s needs which are not compatible with what the ESP course offers. Their needs are far more complex than learning the special aspect of language (i.e. medical); the needs are tied up with issues related to English in relation to “status” and “identity”. To put it in other words, language learning and identity (English for becoming a doctor), is what English for Medical Purposes means to participants in this research. English is not viewed as a tool; it is integrated in the medicine profession and that is why they invest and self-motivate themselves to master it. Seeking legitimacy or recognition in the wider medical community is clear from the aforementioned medical students’ habitus and ‘capital’, the power of medicine profession and English in the medicine profession. ESP seems to infantilise students and teachers; teachers in medical faculties experience a servant-master relationship as vividly expressed by teachers and medical management people when they talked about the low status of ESP teachers in the institution. For medical students, English is part of their vision of themselves as doctors- the imagined medical self which is part of the dual identity they conceive. ESP appears to be far more complicated and it cannot be simply through the “cause - effect” formula. In this
research in Tishreen University, it seems that ESP is reaching a dead end, a closed door by confining itself to dominant approaches.

As for AL, the term ‘problem’ is problematic (Cook & Wei, 2009) which may mean “a research question posed in a particular discipline; … [or] something that has gone wrong which can be solved”. It becomes unclear what problems Applied Linguistics solves in different disciplines (e.g. language acquisition, language teaching, etc.). The problem-solving nature of Applied Linguistics had its major success in “language teaching, such as the syllabuses and methods that swept the world from the 1970s onwards” (p. 2-3). Problems are not solved by talking about them at Applied Linguistics conferences; the solutions have to be taken out in the world to the language users (p.4).

6.1.3 Political and social accountability

Both Applied Linguistics and ESP are seen as politically and socially accountable as apparent in the work in the Critical Applied Linguistics (Pennycook (1997) with problematisation of the given, the taken-for-granted assumptions that ESP has simply to accommodate to the global business and institutional practices. In ESP, critical English for academic purposes was proposed by Benesch (2001) who engaged EAP classes in issues of power by incorporating rights analysis alongside needs analysis and suggested a critical teaching approach that challenges the accommodationist teaching practice and conformity to the academy and institutional. Other critical perspectives (Phillipson 1992, the ideological nature of global spread of English, reviewed in Chapter 1) “have only recently begun to have much of an influence on ESP but they are now having an increasing impact on the ways teachers see and practice their profession” (Hyland, 2007:394). The present study aims to contribute to this paradigm as it shows the impact global English has on foreign language policy in Syria and the conflict ESP introduction has created. If the critical perspective has only recently appeared to have an influence, this does not mean that it deals with less important issues. The case of ESP studied in this research can stand as an example of ESP research which is diverted from the “mainstream” to propose a new way of understanding ESP that has been researched from the same perspective for decades and which may lead us to nowhere.
6.1.4 Distance from the real professional world

In the AL discipline, a most recent volume edited by Srikant Sarangi and Christopher N. Candlin, compiled contributions of Applied Linguistics (discourse analysts) to professional communication studies; the understanding of communications in the professions (e.g. law, healthcare, business and management, organisations, etc.) highlighting the critical juncture moments of Applied Linguistic research that goes far beyond the established paradigm of Language for Specific Purposes. The edited volume aimed at extending the domains of Applied Linguistics to contribute to what Sarangi (2005) calls an “Applied Linguistics of Professions” (Sarangi, 2005:380), in which the focus is more on language use in professions” (Sarangi & Candlin, 2011:3). The book is a state-of-the-art work that aims to

build bridges to neighbouring disciplines and to critically discuss which impact the solutions discussed do in fact have on practice. This is particularly necessary in areas like language teaching and learning – where for years there has been a tendency to fashionable solutions without sufficient consideration of their actual impact on the reality in schools. (Knapp & Antos, 2011: xii-xiii)

Candlin & Sarangi have been committed to language/communication in professional contexts especially in healthcare research for the last three to four decades (Sarangi & Candlin, 2011). The Journal of Applied Linguistics (JAL) with the more specific title Journal of Applied Linguistics and Professional Practice (JALPP) in 2004 marks a discursive turn in the mainstream Applied Linguistics. “Long-term collaboration between a practitioner and a discourse analyst researcher is unusual and brings real benefits but requires a substantial investment of effort by both parties.” (Clarke, 2011:571). Research on collaborative problematisation of professional learning has been on for a time (e.g. Clarke, 2011, between social science and clinical practice; Sally Candlin, 2011, collaboration between discourse analysts and nurse professionals to understand the changing professional identity of nurses in the community of practice; Jones & McCracken, 2011, crossing boundaries between Finance and Law).

The shift towards expanding the territories where applied linguists work in is an example of how AL is seen as community of communities (of practice). As Sarangi and van Leeuwen (2003) pointed out, applied linguists have to become part of the respective “community of practice”.
Applied linguists are no longer the scientific investigators of a phenomenon, but became, together with participants, art of a team, consultants in a process of production or reform, trading between reflexivity and relevance. (p.3)

Despite the increased collaboration between professional studies and applied linguistics, as Cook & Wei (2009:7) remarked, “theory-based solutions that Applied Linguists use are far from the reality that students and teachers face in their classroom”. Similarly, in a survey of ESP, Hyland (2007) stated that ESP is clearly founded on the idea that we use language as members of social groups. This in turn means that it is concerned with communication rather than language and with the ways texts are created and used, rejecting an autonomous view of literacy to look at the practices of real people communicating in real contexts. (Hyland, 2007: 401)

This takes us back to the premise of ESP, to its claim of preparing learners for the real world.

While corpus studies and genre theory are providing us with greater empirically-based understandings of how language is used for specific purposes, we still know relatively little about the relationships between these understandings and learning and teaching. (Paltridge & Starfield, 2011:117)

The resistance and non-participations that learners demonstrated in this study could be signs or indicatives of ESP which seemingly distanced itself (departure) from real language need or real world - at least in the Syrian context. Theory-based ESP seems to be far from the reality of students’ imagined future. Students need tasks related to the real world, they appear as apprentices to the professional medical community which they aspire to belong to in the future. English for medical purposes seems to be a form of medical literacy which students develop through LPP in the medical community. The resistance and non-participation to English inside Tishreen University could have occurred due to the “disjuncture” Norton (2001:170) found “between the learner’s imagined community and the [...] curriculum goals”. Imagination of the medical community is exploited in the sense of belonging, constructing “new images of possibility and new ways of understanding one’s relation to the world” (ibid: 163).

ESP shares “interdisciplinarity” or “boundary-crossing” with applied linguistics. The expansion of the boundaries of applied linguistics indicates the loss of autonomy and a way of not only applying the linguistic knowledge to problem-solve but also bringing AL closer to the real world. Block argues “that applied linguistics itself exists not as a discipline with a centre, but as an amalgam of research interests” which draw on areas
Finally, ESP teachers and applied linguists are apparently similar in the servant-master relations they have with other disciplines, especially with the real-life professions like health care, business, management, law, etc. The interdisciplinarity of applied linguistics is applied to the applied linguist as well who is “a Jack of all trades... a go-between, not an enforcer, a servant, not a master...expected to know a little about many areas, not only of language, but also of philosophy, sociology, computer programming, experimental design and many more [...] master of none as they do not require the in-depth knowledge of the specialist so much as the ability to filter out ideas relevant to their concerns.” (Cook & Wei, 2009:3). ESP teachers can be argued to have the same relationship with subject specialists as indicated in the insecurity teachers feel when teaching the specialist form of English language (i.e. medical English).

The similarities between the two disciplines are multidisciplinary autonomy. The link between the two disciplines is viewed from the perspective of applied linguistics of language teaching and applied linguistics of profession. Applied linguistics and ESP are not solely based on language (language as a core) there must be knowledge from different fields (Cook & Wei, 2009). In their recent book *Mapping Applied Linguistics*, Hall, Smith & Wicaksono, (2011) call for a bottom-up AL which is “an approach to applied linguistics that ‘disinvents’, or at least calls into question some of the assumptions of previous approaches (e.g. the centrality of either cognitive or sociocultural concerns to the exclusion of the other, the privileging of academic agendas over practitioner and client needs; the balkanisation of areas within the field” (p.17). They view applied linguistics as “autonomous applied linguistics” (see diagram below) which is “a discipline concerned with the role language and languages play in perceived problems of communication, social identity, education, health, economics, politics and justice, and in the development of ways to remediate or resolve these problems.” (p.15)
They argued that contemporary applied linguistics is not so much a *field as a way of exploring*; it’s a process, a ‘mode of enquiry’ for working with language-related problems and needs. By mode of enquiry we mean that our four ingredients—(1) starting and finishing with our clients’ needs, (2) being pragmatic, responsive and critically aware, (3) considering both the social and cognitive nature of language, and (4) collaborating on the design and evaluation of solutions—provide a way of thinking and acting as an applied linguist that is fundamentally richer and ultimately more useful than saying, for example, ‘I’m an additional language teacher’ or ‘I’m a translator’. (Hall et al, 2011:19)

The abovementioned issues lead me to rethink ESP in the 21st century. In harmony with the call for new trends in AL, I delineate a vision of ESP drawing on complex issues involved in learning EMP in Tishreen University such as the linguistics issues, national and foreign language policies, education system, issues of power and status, belonging to communities of practice and constructing the professional identity. ESP can draw on results from identity and professional organisational studies among applied linguistics and others to contribute to the development of ESP field to bridge the distance from the world of the profession to help ESP learners learn the language to become a member of the profession.
6.2 Implications for pedagogy

The next section is devoted to present the pedagogical implications for this research drawing on research findings and participants own voiced recommendations. As the research is grounded in a poststructural-complexity framework, it is worth noting that the following implications are only one alternative possibility offered to stakeholders who may not be aware of what happens in practice. It could be an eye-opening piece of an empirical research of a complicated ESP situation which requires drawing on different tools from “mainstream” ESP to improve ESP practice in Syrian Arab universities.

6.2.1 Implications for English language in higher education

► It is important to raise awareness for the policy-practice gap and to invite for dialogue between higher bodies in the ministry, medical tutors, students, and teachers to include the voice of these marginalised groups and find the impact of the policy on their academic and professional practice. Reference to issues of “status” can indicate how the social distinction between ESP teachers and medical tutors on the basis of their medical knowledge is a result of unawareness of the roles and rights of ESP teachers. Policy makers and the actual key agents in practice (i.e. students and teachers) live in two different worlds, in two different realities. Students and teachers could be involved in language policy making as they are the core key agent in the educational process and they can know best what is needed for their future if they are given the chance to express their views and share their visions for a better learning and teaching environment. Teachers can probably be the channel to make students’ voice heard. The Higher Institute of Language which organises the language teaching across all disciplines in the Syrian state universities can take a more effective role by initiating communication with the medical faculties including medical tutors, management personnel, and students to bridge the gap that contributes to the problematic ESP situation in the university. Thus, policy makers come closer to the students’ world through attending to what contributes to their resistance to English courses offered by the university.

With the high demand on English proficiency for job applicants, English, in the view of the policy makers, even if not explicitly stated, is tied up with economic, social and professional development. Hence, equitable employment policies in Syria need to be
provided considering the different language proficiency levels of graduates of Arabic-medium state universities and English-medium private universities. One finding of this study highlighted this point when students constantly compared themselves to medical students in private universities and referred to them as “better” because they study medicine in English. The students’ expressed preference for English as a medium of instruction may be an outcome of their awareness of how English, a privilege for students in private English-medium universities, allows for better employment opportunities.

Language is technology and in the era of internationalisation, the world is connected in cyber space. Medical students, as this study indicated, are smart enough to realise that the English offered to them does not meet their language need in the aspirated future. Hence, rationales for teaching English and ESP at university are needed and must be disclosed to teachers and students alike. This includes a description of objectives of teaching ESP and orienting students, medical tutors, management people and even policy makers to the distinction between teaching English as EFL, ELF, and EIL. The study showed linguistic ignorance of these people to what ESP is and what it involves. English, as this study indicates, is used in reference to development purposes. Hence, students need to be encouraged by teachers and policy makers to appropriate English rather than romanticise about English so that it is used as a means rather than an end in itself. In this respect, committees and work groups might help facilitating communication for better understanding of the purposes for learning ESP at university.

Students appear to have naïve ideas about English as global English. Hence, awareness-raising programmes might be helpful at university level or workshops that could be organised by ESP teachers to orient students and management people to what Global English means and what impact it has so that the ambivalence towards English vs. Arabic can be lessened. Students would stop fantasising about English and stop looking down at themselves as the only Arabs who study medicine in Arabic. The confusion leads them to think of their doctor identity as separate from the Syrian Arab identity. By raising awareness to the role of foreign language teaching (English), this might help them reach reconciliation with their two ‘selves’. Issues of identity and voice are ignored and as Canagarajah (2006) argues, “one cannot suppress one’s values, identities and interests in language and communication. In this struggle to represent our identities and interests in a language, one’s first language (L1) or culture (C1) can be a resource rather than a problem” (p.203). Reassuring the Arab identity of the Syrian
doctor as proudly asserted by students themselves and as clear in the country’s Arabic-medium instruction in response to the national identity, policy makers may need to account for what English adds to the medical identity of the Syrian doctor. Therefore, a reconsideration of the ESP teaching policy in the Arab-medium universities may be needed to better meet the students’ needs of English in the university curriculum.

► A related point to the above is that the study’s findings can indicate the need for more research and publication in Arabic with alongside upgrading the level of arabisation so that students do not feel pushed to consult English medical textbooks. This would minimise the burden students have by reading double sources and will help the lower English proficiency students to feel less guilty or infantilised by not mastering English. English is reported to be associated with development and access to knowledge. If arabisation fails to keep pace with advances in science and technology, there should be a better understanding of the impact of the AMI on medical students and the pressure underpinning it.

► The study demonstrated the failure of ESP courses in the Medical Faculty at Tishreen University to meet the reality. What policy makers might view as best policy to level up the teaching of ESP in higher education seems to lead to no better practice as ESP in this form is not the solution. It is problematic because it is imported from “the west”, ESP course books are west-oriented and they seem to be far from the professional world of medicine. Hence, being aware of culture-sensitivity, aware of the dangers of importing ready models and put it in practice, there must be a considerate attention to what works in this particular context and what does not, so that resistance to the courses offered by the university and the conflict lived is treated reasonably.

► English for Academic Purposes courses are recommended as long as the current language policy is concerned where one content subject is proposed to be taught in English. Curricular development of EAP instead of General English in the first year of the undergraduate study would better equip students with skills needed to better perform in their academic study in the English-medium instruction of one content subject.

► Research-led teaching is needed to better inform practice. This could be done through encouraging and funding local classroom research to be carried out by ESP teachers in association with English language experts or researchers in the Higher Institute of Languages to improve ELT/ESP practice at universities. In particular, policy makers need to take the opportunity of the growing number of research staff (PhD
holders in Linguistics and Applied Linguistics) in the Higher Institute of Languages to change their roles from ELT/ESP teachers and exploit their research capacities and invest in the experience they gained from research training in British universities.

6.2.2 Implications for ESP teachers

If policy makers become aware of the role of ESP teachers and if they authorise them initiating a collaborative course design with subject specialists, this might help coming closer to the world of students and lessen the tension and conflict experienced in the university. Although teachers retain power over learners through the control of material methodology and delivery of the class, the teachers themselves seem, in this study, disempowered by the institution by the ‘technician’ role they are being ascribed. Education is as Pennycook (1990) remarks, “becoming a technical process prescribed by the experts and implemented by the teachers” (p.304). There is a pressing need for teachers to develop ‘critical’ sense of what Spivak calls an awareness “of the limits of knowing” (1993:25, quoted in Pennycook, 2004:807). A need for critical pedagogy whose one thesis is that education is not ideologically neutral so teachers can change the image of their ‘selves’ to see their role as agents of change since educational theory and practice “are grounded in a desire for social change” (Pennycook, 1994: 297). This includes their readiness to be aware of the socio-political and socio-economic issues impacting on their profession and to critique classroom and teaching practices and question their knowledge against the vast increasing field of Critical Applied Linguistics including the various perspectives on the global spread of English and the politics of English. Since teacher training and professional development programmes are not offered to ESP teachers in higher education, it might be helpful to encourage the ESP teachers, who are mainly familiar with “mainstream” ESP tradition, to engage in critical applied linguistics tradition and to get introduced to other non-western applied linguists so that the environment is paved for transforming the classroom to a “community of inquiry” which, as Troudi (2005:125) suggested, “will enable teachers to provide their learners with more meaningful learning opportunities than is often the case”. A ‘community of inquiry’ is a community “in which students listen to one to another with respect, build on one another’s ideas, challenge one another to supply reasons for otherwise unsupported opinions, assist each other in drawing inferences from what has been said, and seek to identify one another’s assumptions” (Lipman, 2003:20).
6.3 New directions in ESP and applied linguistics research

One implication for research is offering considerations for crossing the linguistic borders to rethink how far applied linguists and ESP researchers can go. The loss of autonomy in the two disciplines can be an element of strength that empowers both applied linguists and ESP practitioners though the reconceptualisation of applied linguists and ESP practitioners and researchers as sheer service groups; problem solvers and technicians. In particular, ESP research can be more focused on issues of interest to the actual ‘agents’ in the educational process- the learners and teachers- by going beyond linguistic and needs analysis-based to come closer to the real world of professions (professional communities of practice) which is what the learning a foreign language emails as suggested in this study. The reductionist mechanistic view of ESP in that best theory leads to best practice and vice versa needs to be challenged as unpredicted research outcomes are always possible as this research is one example of. 

Researching language has to be accountable for the complexity of human behaviour which is informed by another layer of complex set of fluid beliefs and attitudes. Therefore, it is suggested that researchers in these fields follow the research to where it leads rather than restricting confining themselves to the existing boundaries which predetermine the scope of research.

As is the case with every research study, some answers were reached but more questions were raised. Each emergent key finding which I discussed under two broad themes in Chapter 6 could be a potential area for an individual inquiry. There are several areas worth investigating in relation to ESP/EMP:

► Since this research was carried out in one institution in one Syrian university, future research in other medical faculties in state and private universities may consolidate the findings of this research or give a better picture of the nature of ESP in Syria especially when private English-medium institutions are involved. A wider inclusion of policy makers may also be of great importance to get more insights on the disparity between the higher bodies discourse and discourse of teachers and students.

► The complex nature of foreign language learning and identity in ESP situation requires further investigation in which the collaboration in ESP research with studies of professional and organisational communication would probably be of value to bring ESP closer to the reality of the professional world. As the identity issue is important in finding when learning English for medical purposes, a replication of this research would
provide more in-depth insights into English for Specific Purposes and identity which, to the best of my knowledge, is scarcely researched.

► Replications of this study on EMP to other professions (other than medicine) would give broader insights into what this study suggests of the shift in linguistic “needs” to the “needs” to create an identity within particular professions.

► A study of the social class and foreign language learning in the Syrian society may add to the understanding of the above question of identity as data showed that some students in this study were well-off and had opportunities to communicate with American medical communities and develop their language and medical knowledge.

► ESP teachers’ professional identity demands research in the FL context as long as the marginalisation of ESP and teaching profession has continued to exist for decades and language teachers are still in the margin no matter how qualified they are.

► A research on the arabisation of medicine and science informed by accounts of medical tutors and medical students’ views are needed in order to understand what students in this study referred to as arabisation and translation are straight-jacketing their professional development. ESP in Syrian Arabic-medium higher education cannot be fully developed without understanding the policy of arabisation and its implementation in the medical faculties. Medical students in the present study named the insufficiency and lack of the Arabic medical textbooks as one driving forces for their preference of English-medium of instruction. Although arabisation in Syria is prioritised, there seems to be some flaws and a pressing need for updating the Arabic medical textbook and increasing space of the translation and arabisation efficiently so that students can feel less the gap they face at the moment between the Arabic and the English medical textbooks. Databases need to be updated and introduced to students who may not be aware of its existence, and collaboration between arabisation bodies and the medical faculties and universities could better bridge the gap and meet the needs of the students and medical tutors.

► An investigation of the role of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) in the medical life as informants in the present study referred to their need for the use of the internet technology which is English-dominant.
Research design and methodology

► A longitudinal in-depth inquiry which engages policy makers, tutors and management officials in the medical faculty in a dialogue with students and ESP teachers could bring about tangible changes in the practice of ESP in Syrian Arabic-medium medical faculties.

► An extensive study of the foreign language policy in Syria and the impact of the mother tongue instruction in medicine as compared to English-medium instruction of medicine in other Arab countries could help unpicking critical issues which only medical students appear to experience.

6.4 Conclusions

6.4.1 Reflection on limitations of the study

As it is the case with every research study, no research can claim perfection and flaws seem to emerge further in the event of conducting the research. For this particular study, I point out few issues which I believe may have limited the research. First, on the methodological axis, initial research method; narrative interviewing tool, was modified in the field due to its unfeasibility with the particular set of research participants who conditioned their participation in the study upon a confirmation from me that no written tasks would be required of them. Other limitations are: a) small numbers of informants, b) no structured observation of lessons, c) no sharing of the data with informants after analysis to check veracity, d) not enough perspectives from management personnel (Deans), course designers, etc. and e) no in-depth exploration of students’ attitudes in interviews.

Second, as data showed later multiple issues seem to overlap considerably when ESP/EMP is explored through the lens of post-structuralism and complexity theory. However, in my attempt to reject the view of ESP as a rigid determined system, I may have, involuntarily, eliminated other ‘deterministic’ views which rest upon ‘cause and effect’ which seems to occupy the mind sets of most participants in this research and the wider community. In short, if the research fails to present rigid ‘causes’ of the ‘problem’ or ‘problems’, it does not necessarily entail failure as our philosophical assumptions
shape the production of knowledge; our approach to research, our treatment of the data and dissemination of the final research report.

Last, due to time constraints, data could not be collected from other medical faculties in other Syrian state universities. Had I had time and been allowed access, comparative studies could have been further explored to better understand the nature of English for Medical Purposes in Syrian Arabic-medium state universities. This relates to the ‘generalisation’ which qualitative research is mostly challenged on. The debate about whether generalisation in qualitative research is/is not a needed construct (Hammersley, Gomm & Foster, 2000), has been going on. Being “particularistic” in nature, the qualitative research premise is that “understanding the nuances and patterns of social behaviour only results from studying specific situations and people, complemented by attending carefully to specific contextual conditions.” (Yin 2011:98). Hence, having acknowledged the uniqueness of each research that studies human events, this research involves a limited amount of data set collected from specific sources. Any modification of the data gathering procedures could have generated a different data type so I do not claim generalisation of the results beyond Faculty of Medicine in Tishreen University. Nonetheless, it is hoped that the finding could contribute to add valuable implications that go beyond the research setting and invite for further research in similar settings and situations in Syrian state medical faculties which are organised under the same terms of articles in the broad language policy bodies in the Ministry of Higher Education.

6.4.2 Concluding thoughts

The thesis comes to a close with an end of an examination of a problematic ESP situation. Although I do not claim to legitimise this story as an absolute “truth” or a complete representation of the reality, grounded in the theoretical views of poststructuralist deconstructionist understanding, I view this thesis as a text in which a story is presented based on my interpretation of realities told by my participants. I believe my inquiry has reconstructed a reasonable picture of the complex EMP situation as experienced by the two core stakeholders in this educational situation; the medical students and the ESP teachers. However, I acknowledge what Derrida (1976; 1982) challenged as having a fixed set of good or bad qualities that determine the text’s legitimacy. In every text there exist points of weakness which causes instability and
which eventually expose the piece of narrative to questioning, challenge and problematisation. By using “reflexivity” in doing and writing up this research, I exploit a deconstructive intervention which illustrates the absence of fixed meaning or identity for a particular experience.

The thesis demonstrated the importance of a more poststructural complexity-inspired approach to ESP which, unlike the typical ESP mechanistic need-analysis and genre analysis-based models, accounts for the complexity of human beings’ learning behaviours by drawing on a multiple network of professional areas that go beyond linguistics and applied linguistics to consider findings from professional studies. Grounding ESP research in link with professional studies can contribute to the construction of the doctor identity and can give a more significant meaning to the immediate learning environment (i.e. classroom) and to the target environment of profession and workplace (i.e. the medicine profession and the medical community). Such an approach engages the main stakeholder in the learning process (i.e., students) to better make sense of the reason behind learning English that goes beyond the linguistic needs already determined by the course designers, book publishers and even by the management people in the particular medical faculties or language institutes.

A more virtual purpose was evident in the cases of medical students’ participants studied. Learning English to become a doctor is what English is learnt for in the Medical Faculty. Hence, more participation with real or virtual medical communities is needed so ESP is not only based on the linguistic patterns of particular genres but also engages with the professional community which is above all what medical students aspire to belong to in the future professional world. Language learning is part of becoming a professional in a particular field which also involves full participation in the target community in all its practices. In other words, genre analysis is only the tip of a large iceberg. Rather than looking at one particular area, oversimplifying the purposes of learning through determining the genres required to be studied to perform well in the actual life of the profession, examining EMP in Tishreen University within a poststructural-complexity framework allowed me to understand the situation as “boundaryless” where learning English for medical purposes is viewed in a non-mechanistic way as a system with emergent properties - among which is learning English as part of learning to be a doctor. Whether English will continue to be a global language or whether its future is threatened, at the particular time when data was collected for the purpose of this research, the rationale for learning ESP/EMP in
Tishreen University as revealed from students’ testimonies is *learning English to become a doctor*, to belong and participate in the wider medical community. Therefore, identity in ESP is an area that requires further research.

Finally, all that can be said is that doing a PhD is a form of legitimate peripheral participation and a process of learning to become a researcher. Developing my thinking and skills, I have taken part in research training activities, presented papers at local and international conferences (IATEFL, 2011, BAAL, 2011, JURE, 2011, ICLLIC, 2010, LAEL, 2010, GSE 2008-2012), and was successful at publishing a chapter book (forthcoming). All these, I believe, are attempts on my part in order to gain basic membership of the community of academic researchers with a specialism in TESOL.


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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Certificate of Ethical Research Approval

UNIVERSITY OF

EXETER

Graduate School of Education

Certificate of ethical research approval

STUDENT RESEARCH/FIELDCWORK/CASEWORK AND DISSERTATION/THESIS
You will need to complete this certificate when you undertake a piece of higher-level research
(e.g. Masters, PhD, EdD level).

To activate this certificate you need to first sign it yourself, and then have it signed by your supervisor
and finally by the Chair of the School’s Ethics Committee.
For further information on ethical educational research access the guidelines on the BERA web site:
http://www.bera.ac.uk/blog/category/publications/guidelines/ and view the School’s statement on the
‘Student Documents’ web site.

READ THIS FORM CAREFULLY AND THEN COMPLETE IT ON YOUR
COMPUTER (the form will expand to contain the text you enter). DO NOT
COMPLETE BY HAND

Your name:  Dima Farhat

Your student no:  580024727

Return address for this certificate:  42 A Higher Bailey Mount, Exeter, EX4 1SB

Degree/Programme of Study:  PhD

Project Supervisor(s):  Dr. Deborah Osberg
                      Professor Tony Wright

Your email address: df228@exeter.ac.uk
                   farhatdima@hotmail.com

Tel:  07926098657

I hereby certify that I will abide by the details given overleaf and that I undertake in my
dissertation/thesis (delete whichever is inappropriate) to respect the dignity and privacy of those
participating in this research.
I confirm that if my research should change radically, I will complete a further form.

Signed: [Signature] .................................................. Date:  23/03/2010

NB: For Masters dissertations, which are marked blind, this first page must not be included in your
work. It can be kept for your records.

Chair of the School’s Ethics Committee
Last updated: August 2009
Certificate of ethical research approval

Your student no: 58C024727

Title of your project:
Exploring the tensions and contradictions in teaching English for Medical Purposes within a university curriculum informed by Arab nationalism and globalization

Brief description of your research project:
The aim of this study is to investigate the English language policy in relation to Arabic in Syrian Higher Education with a special reference to English for Medical Purposes (EMP). It sets out to further critical EAP/ESP research in the foreign language context and reconceptualise its target goals based on the combination of needs analysis and 'rights analysis' and the possibilities it brings about the configuration of power relations in a monolingual Arab state university where EMP is carried out.

Give details of the participants in this research (giving ages of any children and/or young people involved):
My participants include 6 ESP teachers in a Syrian university whose ages vary but all are over 25. Students are all from the School of Medicine in the same university and aged between 18-30. The selection of my 3 student groups were based on purposive criterion sampling strategy.

Give details regarding the ethical issues of informed consent, anonymity and confidentiality (with special reference to any children or those with special needs)
As my participants have been contacted personally by me not through any gatekeepers, all those who gave their consent did that voluntarily and out of interest in the research topic. However, to conform to the School's ethics, I prepared an informed consent form to be distributed to all my participants at the start of the data collection in which I clarify the purpose of the research and its scope and ensure confidentiality as all participants' names (students and teachers) will be anonymously recorded in my research archive on my personal computer and their identities will never be disclosed.

Give details of the methods to be used for data collection and analysis and how you would ensure they do not cause any harm, detriment or unreasonable stress:
Data will be collected from students' and teachers' interviews, students' focus groups and narrative literacy biographies and classroom observation. All are to be conducted voluntarily and I mention in the informed consent form that the participants get familiar with what the research is about and some general description of the data collection methods. They are to be told they have the right to withdraw anytime if they are uncomfortable in the research process. They will be told that their audio recordings (interviews, observation) and written biographies will be transcribed and coded for the research purpose and will not be disclosed to any unauthorised third party without their agreement.

Give details of any other ethical issues which may arise from this project (eg. secure storage of videos/recording interviews/photos/completed questionnaires or special arrangements made for participants with special needs etc.):
As the primary research methods include audio recording whether with interviewing or observation, and written biographies, the audio files and the biographies will be anonymously stored digitally on my personal computer which is password-enabled. Once the research period is complete and data

Chair of the School's Ethics Committee
Last updated: August 2009
are analysed and coded, all recordings, written narratives, and transcripts will be erased upon participants' request. If they give the consent, data will be used when presenting conference papers or any other educational research-related purposes.

Give details of any exceptional factors, which may raise ethical issues (e.g. potential political or ideological conflicts which may pose danger or harm to participants):

N/A

This form should now be printed out, signed by you on the first page and sent to your supervisor to sign. Your supervisor will forward this document to the School’s Research Support Office for the Chair of the School’s Ethics Committee to countersign. A unique approval reference will be added and this certificate will be returned to you to be included at the back of your dissertation/thesis.

N.B. You should not start the fieldwork part of the project until you have the signature of your supervisor.

This project has been approved for the period: 1/3/2010 until: 30/6/2010

By (above mentioned supervisor’s signature) date: 3rd March, 2010.

N.B. To Supervisor: Please ensure that ethical issues are addressed annually in your report and if any changes in the research occur a further form is completed.

SELL unique approval reference: D/L91/3/47

Signed: [Signature]
Chair of the School’s Ethics Committee

This form is available from: [URL]
Appendix B: Sample Informant Consent Form

RESEARCH ETHICS: SAMPLE CONSENT FORM

Full title of Project:
Exploring the tensions and contradictions in teaching English for Medical Purposes within a university curriculum informed by Arab nationalism and globalisation.

Name, position and contact address of Researcher:
Dima Farhat
PhD candidate
Graduate School of Education
University of Exeter
Exeter EX1 2LU

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving reason.

3. I agree to take part in the above study.

4. I agree to the interview / focus group / being digitally recorded

5. I agree to the use of anonymised quotes in publications

Name of Participant        Date        Signature

Name of Researcher        Date        Signature
Appendix C: Sample Focus Group Script

Focus Group 2 Transcript

FG1, GD 28/ 03/2010

If asked to describe the English language, you would probably say, 
R: "This is a difficult and complex language, with many rules and exceptions." 
K: "Yes, and it's also a very beautiful language." 
I: "What are some of the challenges you face in learning English?" 

While watching a DVD, the participants discuss the importance of subtitles. 
M: "I prefer subtitles because they help me understand the dialogue." 
S: "But subtitles can be distracting. I prefer silent movies." 

A: "What is your favorite type of movie?" 

K: "I like action movies. They keep me on the edge of my seat." 
R: "I prefer comedies. They make me laugh." 

A: "Is that true for everyone in the group?" 

K: "No, some people prefer dramas." 
R: "I agree. It really depends on personal preferences." 

A: "How do you think movies can impact language learning?" 

K: "Movies can provide a great way to learn new vocabulary and phrases." 
R: "Yes, they can also help us understand cultural differences." 

A: "Have you ever traveled to an English-speaking country?" 

K: "Yes, I have traveled to the USA." 
R: "I have visited the UK." 

A: "What are some of the differences you noticed?" 

K: "American English is more informal and direct." 
R: "British English is more formal and polite." 

A: "Is there anything else you would like to add about movies and language learning?" 

K: "I think it's important to combine visual media with written materials." 
R: "I agree. It's a great way to reinforce what we learn." 

A: "Thank you both for your insights. That's all for today." 

K: "Thank you for your time." 
R: "Thank you. It was helpful."
Appendix D: Sample of Interview Questions and Answers Transcript

I: wanted to know more about the policy decision about the teaching of ESP at Universities from you as an experienced ESP Teacher at Tishreen. Can you tell me what you know about it and how do you put it in practice?

Razan: Yes, Dima you know this is a new plan from the Ministry where in the first year students learn the basics in English and in Year 2 they start with learning ESP and in Year 3 students will be expected to study one content subject in English.

I: You are right. I read this in the policy document but I noticed there are no detailed accounts of how these should be implemented. I mean, you as the ESP teacher who will deliver the course. Are you provided with more information on the course...

Razan: Ah, you mean course objectives. No no.

I: Intended learning outcomes?

Razan: No not. listen. In theory there should be as the University’s Council usually plan these but not for English…this is why we suffer as they consider us outsiders, not members of the Faculty. For example… er..it remains a fact that English subject is secondary; we suffer as they consider us strangers in the faculty. For example, if you’d ever want to request a change of timetable, especially in the Medical Faculty, they will immediately remind you that they would do this because we are not the ‘medical tutors’. So they treat us as if we are not their teachers…so we are outsiders.

I: I still recall a very similar incident where such requests from me were rejected. That was long time ago before I left for the UK.

Razan: Yes...

I: So, you are not a “their teachers”

Razan: No we are not. We are outsiders. We rarely had instances of cooperation from the tutors in the Medical Faculty.

I: well his sounds ideal if there is this kind of cooperation.

Razan: Yes it is but in practice I have never experienced such a thing so we only relied on our students to know more about what medical subjects are being taught.

I: Are you saying that the Faculty management does not provide guidance for you when teaching medical students?

Razan: No no and even when they claim they are keen on improving English they only stress on us to check the attendance and they do check on us, the teachers, whether we are in class or not…so…. I don’t know.

I: Ok. if you say objectives are not stated, have you tried planning writing your own course objectives? I remember I used to struggle with this when I taught in the Medical Faculty long time ago.

Razan: Yes Dima. They are still the same. I actually do a plan for them. It depends on the students as every course is different. I will tell you one example. I found out from my teaching experience that medical students enjoy and want to practise translating medical texts. They don’t want medical vocabulary or grammar. So I tried using materials (translation) with one group in a course and you know I do not usually give them a translation task of a text that I am not very confident and certain about its translation. I check with an ex-student, a medical doctor whom I ask to check my initial translation of the medical text so I don’t only rely on my information, I check with specialists…

I: Do you do this because you are not sure about the content. Don’t you?

Razan: Yes you know Dima, you taught medical English. Students themselves have different translations so general English is different from medical English. I know that I need help to find the technical medical equivalents…

I: Ah. Ok so do you think you cannot do the translation task to them Razan without being fully knowledgeable of the medical terms?
Razan: It is not my job to teach them medicine. You know this. Our students think that your job is to teach them the subject (medicine) not the language. So in this case with translation of one medical text I received several interpretations from students in one class and they started panicking and asking me about the exams so in the end they are only concerned with exams and marks. When I knew that this is their only concern I decided not to use translation as in the end they will not learn as they will be thinking of the exams only.

I: I remember now Razan what Nancy and I experienced of the insecurity teaching medical contents. Tell me what you think?

Razan: There is misconception as the students do not know we don’t teach the content, we teach the English language. Listen, these students don’t agree on one thing. I used to hear them talking about their medical tutors the same way they do about us the English teachers... so in the end it is the mind-set of the students. I am not there to teach them medicine...

I: I agree but..

Razan: Dima you need to be strong when you are asked in the Medical Faculty as they question you and you should not listen to students or other people in the Faculty..

I: Ok. What do you mean by “strong”?

I mean we need to be of strong character so we can make them respect us as language teachers as they will not do if you are not confident enough... The English language teacher is not respected unless you know your rights and sometime tough. I had so many confrontations in the Faculty... all because we are marginalised but we are monitored and treated badly.

Is it the timetable change thing?

Yes and more...
Appendix E: Interview Guides

I- Focus group guide

Focus Group 1: Past learning experience

►Orientation to research, introducing myself and my research, introducing themselves,
►Informed consent.
►Demographics: age, year of study, gender
►Time-travelling: English in school?

1- When and where have you started learning English? (Age, year, Arabic-medium schools, public, private, etc...)
2- How was the learning experience? How would you evaluate this experience now at this stage?
   Were you a good successful learner of English? What was it meant to you to be successful in the English classes at school? Was it the marks, fluency in speaking, vocabulary repertoire, etc..? if you can remember what the general focus of those classes; its contents…
3- What were the basic skills you were taught at school? (in the English class) (i.e. writing, reading, speaking, listening, grammar and structure,...)
4- Have you used the English language (speaking, reading, writing or listening) outside you classroom at that time (at home, with friends, in street? (or just in class? )
5- Have you used to use Arabic in the English class? How would you evaluate your English teachers?
6- Have you got enrolled in English private classes or private tutoring?

Focus Group 2: Present learning experience /Views on English vs. Arabic in medicine

►Have you used English outside classrooms? (watching international TV, the internet, international conferences, workshops, medical resources, etc.)
►Do you use English in your studies (in medicine)? Explain
►Do medical doctors need to master English? Why?
► Are there any social circumstances that restrict your engagement in learning English? (Emotional, physical, personal)

► What is a good English language class?

► Who has the power in classroom? Does the teacher encourage or give you opportunities to engage with what is taught and how it is taught?

► How would the English language help you sustain your aspirational identities to engage in your discourse communities (medical environment) in a meaningful way?

► Do you read Medical Arabic Journals? Can you name a few?

► Tell me about your experience of studying medicine in Arabic?

► What is effect of AMI on employability?

► Where do you use the language? Work, home, study, etc.

**Focus Group 3:**

► Future expectations

► How would you evaluate yourself as an English language user now?

► If you are given authority to decide on the foreign language policy now? What would you suggest? How would you improve EMP at university?

► Work in groups to work out an imagined EMP course you desire to have studied: goal- content- teaching style-student’s role- setting: class size-assessment- teacher’s role.
II- Teachers interviews

Policy documents: (Ministry of Education and Higher Education, tests samples, textbooks) centralized policy by MOHE and MOE (unified curricula and textbooks)

1- Demographics:
   Age
   Experience (ESP/EMP)
   Qualification
   Institution

2- Policies: curriculum, assessment (criteria and marking) teaching and learning methods, material design, curriculum innovation and intended learning outcomes.

3- Does your institution have a language policy or a language plan? Existing language policy and its development. If your institution does not have a language policy or a language plan, would you be interested in developing one?

4- Teacher’s philosophy of instruction (teaching strategies), students background knowledge and experience, academic environment (institutional requirements), and subject- knowledge (medicine).
## Appendix F: Sample NVivo Coding

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English should be imposed on us. It is an onerous task to bring reference and read

Reference 1: 0.40% Coverage

Reference 2: 0.52% Coverage

Reference 3: 0.50% Coverage

Reference 4: 0.55% Coverage

One subject should be taught in English and there should be English lessons in all subjects and the ordinary English subject should be removed.

All agreed.
## Appendix G: Main Findings Themes and Data Sources

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<th>Resistance to English inside University</th>
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Appendix H: Sample Focus Group Feedback

Students’ feedback on Focus Group 1
(Group D: year 6)

Name:  
Age:  
Year of Study:  
Gender:  

We prefer studying medicine in English
All agreed except Mai who prefers “to read medicine in English as a self-effort”. “But we can start gradually that is in the first three years we could learn the medical terms that we also use in exams. Starting from year 4, the student should all medical subjects in English.

The arabisation policy is wrong. Translation is wrong and distorted…the origin of medicine is America and the major countries who are producing the new scientific knowledge. Arabisation is bad

As long as there are pioneers you have to learn their language not only in medicine but in all sciences
All agreed. “Yes it is preferred to stay up-to-date. We need to learn the language to develop ourselves as well” said Rama. “In the past, Arabs were the pioneers in science so all the world taught sciences in the Arabic language” said Mohammad.

The language of science is English due to America not Britain
All agreed. “Of course because America is a pioneer in the medicine filed and its development and service that is why all medical references are in English” said Rama.

We speak Arabic so Arabic will not be affected. We teach them Arabic there in Iran and Turkey. Arabic is the language of religion so there is no threat to Arabic. We will not forget our origin and roots.

The student in year 1 and 2 does not know what his needs of English are. Awareness started at last in year 4 and 5. They should ask the students in advanced years as in year 1 the student knows nothing, knows no medical knowledge so he is not expected to know what he wants. When they asked us we didn’t know what we wanted. We wanted something easy o we didn’t bother and we got high marks.
All agreed except Kamal who agrees on the first part but not on the need to get something easy to pass with high marks as he is interested in the English language itself.

In my view, we must start with something like how to deal with a medical textbook. For example, like in the British Consulate, you have to prepare for a medical topic and explain it and simulate it as if it is real. Imagine how nice it would be if we had something like this or even some similar in early years or even in advanced years. All agreed.

When I got in year 4 I had seriously to use English references. I was not aware that I need English unless I wanted to travel to study abroad.

“That is what is happening but I am against” said Kamal. “Agree, but even if I don’t want to travel abroad I am aware of the importance of English” said Sinan. “I am not going abroad but I study references in English from year 2” said Mai. Rama agrees with Mai. Ayham agrees to this statement and either does Mohammad. “I felt I need because I went to hospitals and dealt with clinical case studies. I became aware that learning English will make me better deal with clinical case studies and will make me think about the important stuff” Mohammad said.

In hospitals, everything is in Arabic. The Iranians who come to work in our hospital have to take an Arabic test but their level is poor. We don’t speak to them. What is important is that they know how to speak to patients.

All agreed. “This is true and I am against” Kamal said. “This is what is happening” said Rama. “Some doctors name the terms in English during the clinical lecture. The number of those doctors is in increase.” said Mohammad.
Appendix I: Samples of Critical Moments on the Language Learning Journey

Maps
2008
- Started studying medicine in English
- Read books and novels
- Went to school to learn
- Visited the USA over the summer
- Did this every year starting from 2000

1997
- English teacher at the

Born in the USA
1989
- Learned how to speak English
- Moved to Syria
1995-1996
- Spelling only