

## Challenges Faced by Students of Medicine in Learning Medical English and Strategies for Overcoming Them Effectively

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### **Abstract**

Medical English (ME) serves as the backbone of medical education, particularly for students from non-English-speaking nations. This study explores the challenges Afghan medical students face in learning Medical English and proposes effective strategies to overcome these barriers. It highlights the critical role of Medical English (ME) in achieving academic excellence, enhancing patient communication, and accessing international medical research literature. Using a mixed-methods

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approach, the study addresses key research questions, including the primary challenges faced by students, the impact of these challenges on academic and clinical performance, and the effectiveness of strategies such as flashcards, peer discussions, and technology integration. The findings underscore the importance of adopting innovative, student-centered approaches to Medical English (ME) education, offering valuable insights for curriculum development and teaching methodologies in Afghanistan and similar contexts.

**Keywords:** Medical English, Challenges, Strategies, Afghan Medical Students, Mixed-Methods, Language Proficiency

## **Introduction**

The role of Medical English (ME) in Afghanistan Medical Universities and Medical Faculties is undeniably crucial. As the international lingua franca of medical research, literature, and clinical communication, English serves as a gateway to global medical knowledge and collaboration [13]. However, for Afghan medical students, mastering ME presents significant challenges. These challenges are exacerbated by linguistic disparities between English and local languages such as Dari and Pashto, the complexity of medical terminology, and limited opportunities for English-language practice in clinical and academic settings [14][12].

The differences in grammatical structures, vocabulary, and phonetics between English and Afghanistan's native languages create a sudden learning curve for students [11]. Additionally, the highly specialized nature of medical terminology further compounds these difficulties, requiring not only language proficiency but also conceptual understanding [6]. Moreover, the lack of immersive English-language environments in clinical training limits students' ability to practice and apply their skills in real-world scenarios, hindering their confidence and competence [15].

While these challenges are well-documented in general contexts, there is a lack of research addressing the unique socio-cultural and educational context of Afghan medical students. This study seeks to fill this gap by identifying the specific challenges Afghan students face in learning ME and proposing tailored strategies to address these impediments. By exploring innovative teaching methodologies, enhancing access to English-language medical resources, and creating

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**Language in India** [www.languageinindia.com](http://www.languageinindia.com) ISSN 1930-2940 Vol. 26:2 February 2026

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opportunities for practical application, we aim to empower Afghan medical students to overcome these barriers [13]. Ultimately, improving proficiency in ME will not only enhance individual academic and professional outcomes but also contribute to the broader advancement of Afghanistan's healthcare system [2].

### **Research Gap**

A review of the literature reveals that discussions on challenges in learning ME have traditionally focused on general issues faced by non-native speakers. However, there is a lack of research addressing the unique socio-cultural and educational context of Afghan medical students [11]. This study aims to fill this gap by identifying the specific challenges Afghan students face in learning ME and proposing tailored strategies to address these impediments.

### **Literature Review**

Existing literature highlights several key challenges in learning ME:

1. **Vocabulary and Terminology:** Medical English is highly technical, and students often struggle with unfamiliar terms that lack direct translations in their native languages [10] [9].
2. **Reading and Comprehension:** Complex academic texts in English pose significant challenges, as they contain intricate terminologies and abstract concepts [5].
3. **Cultural and Socio-Cultural Barriers:** Limited exposure to English-speaking environments restricts opportunities for practice, hindering language acquisition [7].
4. **Speaking and Patient Communication:** Many students lack confidence in speaking English, particularly in clinical settings, due to fear of making errors [6].

While existing studies have identified vocabulary, reading comprehension, and cultural barriers as common challenges in ME learning, there is limited research on how these issues manifest in the Afghan context. For instance, studies by Alanazi et. el. (2024) [1] and Lopez et. el (2023) [8] focus on general non-native speakers but do not account for the unique linguistic and socio-cultural factors in Afghanistan. This study builds on these findings by exploring how these challenges are experienced by Afghan medical students and proposing context-specific solutions

### **Research Questions**

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This study addresses the following questions:

1. What are the primary challenges Afghan medical students face in learning ME?
2. How do these challenges impact academic performance and clinical communication?
3. What strategies can improve ME proficiency among Afghan medical students?
4. How can technology support ME learning for non-native speakers?
5. How can teaching methodologies be adapted to better meet the needs of Afghan students?

### **Methodology**

This study employs a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative methods to comprehensively analyze the challenges and strategies related to ME learning.

### **Justification for Mixed Methods**

The mixed-methods approach ensures a holistic understanding of the research problem. Quantitative methods provide numerical data on the prevalence of challenges and the effectiveness of strategies, while qualitative methods offer deeper insights into students' personal experiences [14].

### **Research Design**

The study adopts a descriptive research design, utilizing surveys, interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis to gather data.

### **Respondents**

The study includes 100 first-year medical students from Kabul Medical University, selected through random sampling to ensure representativeness.

### **Data Collection Instruments**

1. **Surveys:** A structured questionnaire was used to collect quantitative data on perceived challenges.
2. **Interviews:** Semi-structured interviews with 50 students provided qualitative insights into their experiences.
3. **Classroom Observations:** The researcher observed ME classes to assess student participation and teaching methods.

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4. **Document Analysis:** Medical textbooks and online resources were reviewed for their adequacy in supporting ME learning.

### **Data Analysis**

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including percentages, means, and frequency distributions. Qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify recurring themes and insights. The integration of these methods allowed for triangulation, enhancing the validity and depth of the findings.

### **Results and Discussion**

#### **Challenges Faced by Afghan Medical Students**

The study identified several critical challenges hindering Afghan medical students' proficiency in Medical English (ME):

1. **Vocabulary and Terminology:** A significant majority of students (72%) reported substantial difficulties in comprehending and retaining complex medical terminology.
2. **Reading Comprehension:** Approximately 65% of participants expressed challenges in understanding and interpreting academic texts written in English.
3. **Speaking and Confidence:** Over half of the students (58%) admitted to avoiding the use of English in clinical settings due to a lack of confidence and fear of making errors.

#### **Effective Strategies for Overcoming Challenges**

The study also explored strategies that students found beneficial in addressing these challenges:

1. **Flashcards and Dictionaries:** The use of flashcards and medical dictionaries emerged as a highly effective tool, with 74% of students reporting improved retention and understanding of medical vocabulary.
2. **Peer Discussions:** Collaborative learning through peer discussions was found to enhance comprehension and confidence, with 68% of students indicating measurable progress in their ME skills.
3. **Technology Integration:** The incorporation of technology, such as virtual patient simulations and e-learning platforms, proved advantageous for 62% of participants.

## Discussion

These findings align with previous studies, such as those by Alanazi et.al. (2024) [1] and Fernandez et. el. (2011) [4], which also identified vocabulary and confidence as major barriers. However, this study adds new insights by highlighting the specific challenges faced by Afghan students, such as the lack of immersive English-language environments in clinical settings. The effectiveness of flashcards and peer discussions echoes findings by Alhamami (2024) [2], but the high preference for technology-based tools among Afghan students suggests a unique opportunity for leveraging digital resources in this context.

## Conclusion

This study underscores the considerable challenges encountered by Afghan medical students in mastering Medical English (ME), with particular difficulties observed in vocabulary acquisition, reading comprehension, and oral proficiency. By addressing the research questions, the study highlights the effectiveness of evidence-based strategies such as flashcards, peer discussions, and technology-driven learning tools. These findings have significant implications for medical education in Afghanistan, suggesting that integrating these strategies into the curriculum can enhance students' ME proficiency and, ultimately, their academic and professional success. Future research should explore the long-term impact of these strategies and their applicability across diverse educational contexts.

## Recommendations

1. Integrate ME more effectively into the medical curriculum by introducing dedicated ME courses and workshops.
2. Leverage technology, such as virtual patient simulations and e-learning platforms, to create immersive learning experiences.
3. Provide more opportunities for students to practice English in clinical settings through role-playing exercises and simulated patient interactions, fostering a supportive environment free from the fear of mistakes.

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