

# Importance of English language for medical students

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## Abstract

English plays a vital role in medical studies and forges the path for medical students to deepen their knowledge with updated medical information, books, articles, and the latest research, which are primarily available in English language, but that is not all. Medical students need to study English to pursue careers in the healthcare field, where the knowledge of this language can be crucial at times, therefore, English is essential for academic and professional purposes. The following review article aims to discuss the importance for medical students and doctors to learn English in order to develop in different settings, the Benefits of knowing professional English in the Healthcare field, and the Drawbacks of not understanding the English language.

## Keywords

English for medical purposes, healthcare field, English skills, higher education

## Introduction

English takes a central place in the international Educational arena and has gained the status of “lingua Franca” since it emerged as the leading language in science, healthcare, media, education, and technology. From the point it became means of international communication, English as a second/foreign language has taken a central place in curriculums at higher educational institutions. It is particularly essential for medical students as updated materials, textbooks, and scientific research findings are vastly available in English. Knowledge of this language makes it easier to surf the internet for necessary information, and making presentations for seminars or practicums. Mastering the English language also increases the participation opportunities in the Foreign Exchange Programs. Further, in their future career, doctors need to know English for successful communications with patients and colleagues and

professional development, such as participating in international conferences, doing research, and getting published in international scientific journals.

As the English language plays a meaningful part in medical students' education, some studies have been conducted in this direction. One of the most noteworthy research was done by Vahdany and Gerivani (2016) [1] intending to find out the English language needs of medical students and General Practitioners. Findings of the study showed that both, Medical students and General Practitioners valued firstly, reading skills, secondly, writing skills, and then speaking competencies. However, different results have been shown by the study done by Mustafa Naci KAYAOĞLU and Raşide DAĞ AKBAŞ (2016) [2] at Karadeniz Technical University, Turkey. According to their study, in which 169 volunteer medical students participated, speaking skills were identified as most important, followed by listening, reading, and writing skills.

The purpose of my review article is to discuss the English language needs of medical students in their academic activities, the use of professional English in the healthcare field, and the drawbacks of not understanding this language properly.

## **English language needs of medical students and doctors in their professional career**

In my 12-year career as an English Specialist at a higher education institution, I sometimes hear the question from some non-willing students 'why do we need to learn English?' Some often defend their opinion with the 'national ideology', claiming that, they only have to know the native language. I'd like to quote Dr. Javier Lucaya and answer those students: 'that unless you know enough English to read the medical literature, it is almost impossible to keep up to date with medical advances. I honestly feel that English should be a compulsory subject at medical school'.

Fortunately, there aren't many of these students who need to be proven the importance of foreign language, especially English, which is a vital part of the curriculum in Georgian higher education institutions. It is widely used in different academic and scientific activities.

The term "lingua-franca", which I mentioned in the "Introduction", explains the role of English as an instrument of communication worldwide. It takes a central place in academic activities such as **Teaching and learning**-knowledge of proficient English and gives students access to better educational programs, better courses, a wider range of information (mostly accessible on the internet), scholarship programs, and access to various online courses or

webinars. **Participating in international conferences-** To be a part of the global community, and to participate in international conferences, seminars, or workshops, an understanding of English is crucial. **Participating in exchange programs or training abroad** - To gain a place at one of the foreign university as an exchange student, it is very important that you have a good command of the English language. fluency in English gives students opportunities to study and train abroad. Without its knowledge students aren't able to do well in the local and international arena.

The dominance of English in international academic circles and publications has increased during the last few decades. The majority of indexed science journals, use English to acquire broader international authorship and readership, as most international conferences use English as a communication language to attract more international researchers. consequently, English becomes the main language of scientific communication.

I can list more reasons to justify the need for teaching English to Medical students, and why it should be compulsory for them to reach at least B2 level in General English and EMP (English for Medical Purposes). Firstly, students need to master basic language skills such as Reading, Writing, Listening, and Speaking. It is also important to apply the knowledge in practice. For this, they need to acquire Professional English language skills (English for Medical Purposes=EMP).

The significance of EMP for medical students has been studied. According to research done by Poedjiastutie & Puspitasari, in 2019 [3], English helps doctors for better performance in their professional setting as doctors, and knowledge of proper medical terminology for future doctors is crucial at times. Muhammad, et.al. (2018) [4] in one study found that professional English was needed for participation in seminars, comprehension of English medical literature, and medical equipment manuals, communication with foreign patients and other health professionals writing medical purpose letters and prescriptions, taking medical histories. To do the job properly, the doctor must be able to read and fully understand even difficult medical texts, have comprehensive listening and writing skills, and fluently communicate with patients and colleagues from other countries. Therefore, proper knowledge of the English language will pave the way for accomplishments in study and career.

**So, what are the drawbacks of not understanding the English Language?** Healthcare professionals must be proficient in their use of English. Even the smallest miscommunication could be potentially devastating then there are lives at stake. Doctors need to have good bedside manners, be empathetic, and give patients information on their health status.

It is observed that quite often healthcare providers blame patients for not adhering to medical prescriptions and treatments when the problem may be that patients simply don't understand the medical terms.

## **Conclusion**

Having considered all the above points, we can conclude that English is one of the important languages in the healthcare industry. This is the language that connects the professionals, makes it possible to transfer experience, skills, and knowledge, and is very important to providing quality care to patients.

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