

# Learning Persian as a second language: The perspectives and challenges of international medical and allied health science students

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## ABSTRACT

### Background

International medical and allied health science students of Tehran University of Medical Sciences (TUMS) speak languages different from the official language (Persian) of the Iranian people. To integrate well into the Iranian community and interact well with patients in clinical settings they learn the Persian language, even though the medium of instruction for international students is the English language. This study explored the perspectives and challenges of international students regarding the learning of the Persian language.

### Methods

This descriptive phenomenological study used purposive sampling to select 18 international students for the study. Participants were carefully selected from different schools in order to triangulate the data. The method of data collection was a face-to-face interview using four interview guide questions with probes. Each interview lasted between 15 to 20 minutes.

### Results

The mean age of participants was 32.4 years. International graduate students had a positive attitude towards the learning of the Persian language. However, their proficiency in the Persian language was

generally low and it minimally affected their academic work. The effects of the language barrier as expressed by the students included difficulty in communicating with some administrative staffs to schedule appointments or lessons with professors, seek help from laboratory assistants, and knowledge transfer/sharing among International graduate students and Iranian students who did not speak English. Only 5.5% (1 of 18) of students completed the first of six levels of Persian language lessons. **Reasons for dropping out from the language sessions** included long duration of sessions per day, the academic workload of graduate students, conflict of Persian language classes with other compulsory classes and Persian language content and teaching methods.

## Conclusion

International graduates students had an interest in learning the Persian language even though it is not compulsory for them. Separating graduate students from undergraduates, reducing the duration and number of classes per week, revising the content and teaching methods of Persian language according to the need of graduate students could motivate them to learn the Persian language.

**Keywords:** *International Students, medical students, graduate students, Perspectives, challenges, Persian language, TUMS*

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Persian is an important language of the Middle East and Central Asia. The language is ranked among the world's 20 most commonly spoken first languages. It has around 62 million native speakers and about 50 million or more people speak it as a second language (1). It is the official language of the people of the Republic of Iran and the medium of instruction in most Universities in Iran. Some Iranian universities require international students to learn the language. This is done to facilitate their interaction with the people of Iran and with patients in healthcare facilities. At the International campus of Tehran University of Medical Sciences, learning the Persian language is compulsory for international undergraduate students and optional for international graduate students. However, in some departments, it is compulsory for international graduate students pursuing clinical programs to learn the language. **This is to enable them communicate and interact with patients, their relatives, and healthcare professionals at the clinical sites during their training.**

The acquisition of a different language is a common occurrence around the world. According to Archibald et al., exposure to a second language can enhance the complexity of the first-language syntax used, enhance language use skills, and enhance non-linguistic skills such as divergent thinking and attitudes toward others (2). Learning the Persian language by international graduate students pursuing clinical programs will enhance their interaction with patients and clinical staff. **In Iran, language barrier increases the difficulties of international students in navigating through the physical, social, and cultural environment in the country. These challenges have the potential to affect the academic work of students. Some students may feel discriminated, marginalized and unequally treated because of their inability to communicate (3) well with patients, patient relatives, and staff in the clinical setting. This may reduce students' self-efficacy, confidence, and motivation as well as reduce their participation in academic work (4). Furthermore, there is evidence that adults face substantial difficulty in learning a new language, especially in school settings (5). Adults are also less likely to gain new language competence as natives in both speaking and comprehension (5,6). The main objective of this study was to assess the perspectives and challenges of international postgraduate students in learning Persian as a second language at the international campus of Tehran University of Medical Sciences, Iran. We interviewed 18 international graduate students to provide data for the study. Themes that emerged from the interviews were categorised based on the research questions. The categories were critiqued and revised to allow for different interpretations and**

to seek the most accurate representation of the participants responses. Our study provides evidence that could lead to policy change in the teaching of the Persian language to international graduate students at the international campus of Tehran University of Medical Sciences.

## **2. Methodology**

This study was conducted at the international campus of Tehran University of Medical Sciences (TUMS). The campus was established in 2006 and since then the number of international students studying both graduate and undergraduate programs in the area of medicine and allied health sciences keep on increasing. There is an average of 700 undergraduate and graduate international students from countries all over the world including Nigeria, Ghana, Gambia, Senegal, Zimbabwe, Ethiopia, USA, Iraq, Palestine, Spain, Papua Guinea, Bangladesh, and Pakistan studying at the international campus. Some of the schools of TUMS International Campus in which international students are studying include the schools of public health, pharmacy, medicine, advanced technology, nursing, nutrition rehabilitation, and dentistry.

### **2.1 Study design**

This qualitative study employed a descriptive phenomenological study design to examine the perspectives and challenges of medical and allied health science students face in learning the Persian language at TUMS. Phenomenology is concerned with the lived experiences of the people (7). It explores the social and psychological perspectives of people on issues of interest (8). This methodology encourages participants to give a full description of their experience, regarding their feelings, thoughts, perception, and sensations of a phenomenon. The goal of conducting phenomenological research is to gain a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of participants (9). Researchers can then interpret the various aspects, dimensions, and patterns that emerge in order to inform, explain, support, criticize, or challenge policy and action.

### **2.2 Number of Participants**

The study included all international graduate students studying at TUMS international campus and learning Persian as a second language. Purposive sampling was chosen in determining the primary participants. A sample size of 12 to 20 participants was estimated but information saturation was reached with 18 participants. Creswell (10) recommends interviews with up to 10 people for a phenomenological study. The objectives and inclusion criteria of the study were explained on a telegram platform of international graduate students. Informed consent was explained, and students who voluntarily consented and agreed to be interviewed were met at a convenient time and place, either at their respective schools or at dormitories, for a face-to-face interview. Eighteen graduate students comprising of 12 PhD, 5 MSc and 1 MPH students were interviewed for the study. We ensured the protection of privacy and confidentiality for all participants. Participants were carefully selected from different schools - schools of medicine, nursing and midwifery, nutrition, allied medical science, public health, rehabilitation, and school of advance technology in medicine and Pharmacy-in order to triangulate the data to either validate or contrast it.

### **2.3 Data collection**

Data were collected between October and November 2017. The method of data collection was a face-to-face interview using four interview guide questions: 1) What is your take on learning the Persian language as a graduate student? 2) What are the challenges you are confronted with learning the Persian language at the international campus? 3) Does your inability to speak the Persian language affect your studies in TUMS? 4) What suggestions will you give to improve the learning of the Persian language among international graduate students?

Each interview lasted between 15 to 20 minutes. The first author conducted the interviews. The participants were informed of the study objectives and procedures, including audio recording, and they provided verbal consent prior to initiating the interviews. Participants were asked several follow up questions for clarity and detailed presentation of issues. Questions were open-ended to ensure that the data was a true representation of the participants' thoughts concerning the subject matter. All interviews were recorded using an audio tape recorder.

## 2.4 Data analysis

Data from the interviews were transcribed, then analysed using **inductive thematic approach**. This method involves reading, browsing, reflection, coding, validation of codes and searching for emerging patterns in the data (11,12). Through this process, we were able to generate categories relevant to the research questions. The codes and themes that emerged were reviewed, critiqued and revised to allow different interpretations and to seek the most accurate representation of the responses.

## 3.0 Results

In total, 18 interviews with students were held. Table 1 presents the participant's characteristics. Participants' ages range between 26 to 45 years (mean 32.4).

**Table 1. Characteristics of participants for the face-to-face interview**

Schools	Department	Level	Sex	Age (years)
School of medicine	Medical physics	MSc	M	29
Nursing and Midwifery	Critical care nursing	MSc	M	36
School of nutrition	Community nutrition	PhD	M	33
Nursing and Midwifery	Nursing	PhD	M	32
Allied medical science	Allied medical science	MSc	M	38
Public health	Medical entomology and vector control	PhD	M	34
Medicine	Pharmacology	PhD	F	28
Rehabilitation	Physiotherapy	PhD	M	27
Advance technology in medicine	Medical biotechnology	MSc	F	26
Public health	Epidemiology	PhD	M	36
Pharmacy	Pharmaco-economics	PhD	F	45
Public health	Epidemiology	PhD	F	28
Public health	Health Education	PhD	M	31
Nursing and Midwifery	Reproductive health	PhD	F	34
Medicine	Anatomy	MSc	M	31
Advance technology	Medical nanotechnology	PhD	M	32
Public health	Pathobiology (immunology)	PhD	M	36

Public health	Public health	Mph	F	28
Total number =18				<b>Mean age:32.4</b>

The main themes that emerged from the face-to-face interview included; graduates attitude towards the learning of the Persian language, graduate international students' proficiency in Persian language, experience in departments, experience in community, motivation to learn Persian language, challenges in learning the Persian language and recommendations to improve the learning of the Persian language. Table 2 represents the major themes and sub-themes that emerged from the face-to-face interview.

**Table 2. Major themes and sub-themes that emerged from the face-to-face interviews**

Main Theme	Sub-themes
Introduction/Demographics	Age, background, school/work,
Personal characteristics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attitude towards learning of Persian language</li> <li>• Motivationfor learning the language</li> <li>• No compelling force to learn the language.</li> <li>• Proficiency of Persian language by graduate international students</li> </ul>
Experience in departments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Effect of the language on academic work.</li> <li>• English proficiency of professors</li> <li>• English proficiency of administrative staff</li> </ul>
Graduate students Experience in the community with respect to learning of the Persian language.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Graduate students Experience in the community with respect to learning of the Persian language</li> </ul>
Challenges in learning the Persian language	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The age difference between graduate and undergraduate students</li> <li>• Class duration</li> <li>• Time of Persian classes</li> <li>• The workload of graduate students</li> <li>• Content and teaching methods</li> <li>• Conflict with classes</li> </ul>
Recommendations;	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Separation of graduate and undergraduate students</li> <li>• Reducing the duration of classes</li> <li>• Improving the content and teaching methods</li> </ul>

### 3.1 Attitude towards learning of the Persian language

All of the participants had a positive attitude towards learning of the Persian language, even though it is not compulsory for graduate students. They stated that learning a new language has so many benefits and they were happy the Tehran University of Medical Sciences gave them the opportunity to learn the Persian language. One of the participants said:

*“Learning of Persian language by graduate students is a good thing for those who are interested. It is also good the university did not make it compulsory for graduate students to learn the Persian language” (MSC male, 31 years). Another participant puts it this way “I enjoy learning new things, it was good for me. it was a nice experience learning a new language, getting to interact with people and being able to pick up some few words inside the classroom and within the community, I'm able to say a few words” (PhD Male 32 years).*

Some other students felt that it was necessary for them to learn the language even though it was optional because they need it during their practical periods/sessions at the hospital in order to interact with patients. One of such students said,

*“Taking the Persian language is very necessary because of us as clinical students; we need to understand the Persian language in order to communicate with our clients in the hospital” (MSC male 36 years).*

As a foreign student in a country in which its people speak a language different from yours is a compelling need to learn their language in order to get well integrated into the new community. A female PhD student said:

*“... it's very important as far as living in this country is concerned because learning the language is important in order to know about the place you are living in in order to better communicate with the people” (PhD female 28 years).*

However, for some other participants, the motivation to learn the Persian language diminished when they realized that their studies would be conducted in the English language:

*“Somehow, I lost interest because my studies were in English my professor was teaching English and everything was in English, so I did not feel any acute need to learn the language so that's how I kind of lost interest in learning the Persian language” (PhD male 36 years).*

Most of the participants indicated that they started attending the Persian language classes at the International Campus for some time before they dropped along the way after completing the first of six levels or just abrupt discontinuation of the classes for most of the participants.

*“When I came, I started and I thought that it would be easier initially, but it was difficult for me. I was not able to cope because of my academic works so I dropped out” (Msc male 31 years).*

*“I was able to do the first level smoothly based on my own passion to learn the Persian language, as I complete the first level and wrote the exam, I quit” (MSC female 26 years).*

### 3.2 Proficiency in the Persian language by graduate International students

Given the fact that it was optional for graduate students to learn the Persian language in Tehran University of Medical Sciences, the Persian language proficiency was generally low among graduate students because most of them dropped out of the language classes or quit after completing the first level. When asked how well participants could speak the Persian language after one year of stay in Tehran University of Medical Sciences, one of the participants said:

*"I can speak a little bit of Persian language like to say, "how are you" "I'm sorry" "when is my class" "I am coming" etc. However, I cannot make complete sentences. Sometimes I mix Persian and English and sign language" (PhD female 28 years).*

On a scale of 1-10, 1 being least proficient and 10 being more proficient in speaking the Persian language after one year of stay in Tehran University of Medical Sciences most participants in this study rated themselves below 4. A participant who had been in the department for more than 4 years said: *"I think I will pick 3"(PhD, male 36 years).* It is worth noting that the female participants in this study showed improved proficiency in learning the language than their male counterparts.

*"If I start talking to the shopkeepers you think I really understand the Persian language. I think I am really good in Persian because anytime I communicate with them, they say good!your Persian is good" (PhD female 45 years).*

*"I can speak the Persian language; I understand the Persian language because I have friends and I go to the market, alongside, I chat with people. I will rate myself six (6) out of ten (10) in terms of proficiency in the Persian language" (PhD female 28 years).*

### **3.3 Effect of the language on academic work**

Most participants had little knowledge of the Persian language, therefore, we intended to find out from participants, whether their inability to speak and understand the Persian language affects their studies at Tehran University of Medical Sciences. Most (15 of 18) participants stated that their inability to speak and understand the Persian language does not in any way affect their academic activities, however, knowing the language would have facilitated information sharing among International students and their Iranian counterparts. The following were how participants captured this phenomenon:

*"It doesn't affect my studies, but learning the language is important because if you're able to speak their language you are able to flow with the right to get more information from them and you are able to express yourself with them in terms of what you need and it will it would help the learning process" (MSc male 31 years).*

*"Not at all because my classes are done in English and the instruction is English and so I don't need Persian in my academic work, my professors are proficient in English and I really do need it" (PhD male 32 years).*

*"I take my courses fully in English and I do not need to learn the Persian language official so it is optional for me" (PhD male 36 years).*

However, 3 out of 18 participants stated that their inability to speak and understand the Persian language affects their academic studies/activities. One of them puts it as: *"... it is a blunt, yes, specifically the challenges I am facing in my school is only defined by one problem, and that is I don't know Persian and that is the challenge in my department precisely because some of the professors are able to speak English, but some of them it is not comprehensible they are doing little translation from Persian to English so it is difficult to understand" (MSc female 26 years).*

Some students felt less important as compared to their Iranian colleagues and there was a perception that once they do not understand the native Persian language, they are likely not to meet their learning expectations and needs.

*"Because of the language barrier we feel a little less welcomed when it comes to learning, you would learn less because you cannot interact more with your professors, you cannot communicate with your fellow Iranian students, there will not be a channel of knowledge transfer" (MSc female 26 years).*

The issue of internship also surfaced as one of the areas students face challenges. Those who had to undertake an internship or had taken an internship expressed the difficulty they faced in the field because they could not speak and understand the Persian language:

*"I was made to go for an internship in for about 4 weeks at the north of Iran and I was the only international student with Iranian students and when we went so many communication went on but I was disadvantaged because I couldn't speak Persian. You come across the natives and the place they don't speak English so if I had learnt the Persian language, it will be very interesting" (PhD M 34 years).*

Participants have also revealed some communications issues in the various departments with respect to administrative staff. They stated that soliciting for information, booking appointments with professors and scheduling classes comes with challenges because of communication barriers between them and administrative and laboratory staff members.

*"Some of the lab people only speak Persian, if I want reagent in the lab I don't know how to ask for it" (MSc female 26).*

*"Maybe I have to fix a lecture with my professor, I have to book an appointment, I have to speak the Persian language so in that kind of situation I look for someone that will speak to them on my behalf " (PhD female 45 years).*

*"When you I am in the lab, communicating with my professor is difficult because she does not understand English very well. I have a lot of problems communicating with her or booking an appointment with her" (PhD male 27 years).*

### **3.4 Challenges in learning the Persian language**

All participants expressed interest in learning the Persian language. They, however, expressed some challenges, which affected their quest to learn the Persian language. Some of such challenges revealed in this study include a class composed of varied age groups-elderly and young students, class duration per session, the workload of graduate students, teaching methods and conflict of Persian classes with other mandatory classes.

The normal session for Persian classes within this study period was 8 hours per week and students had to stay for 4 hours continuously per day. This arrangement made it difficult for most graduates to cope and continue with the Persian language classes. The following are extracts from some participants:

*"The major challenge is the timing, you know when you are learning a foreign language, it is supposed to be very flexible for you, learning a foreign language -something you don't know-it's not easy we are being forced to be in a class for 4 hours" (MSc Male 29 years),*

*"... If I want to keep postponing lectures because of Persian which is not compulsory for me, I will lose more than I would gain, so I had to choose between academic work and learning Persian language" (PhD Male 32 years).*

*"I joined the International College for the classes, but because they didn't have the facilities to arrange my classes according to my PhD schedule, so there was a big conflict between my classes and their classes, for that problem I just left the Persian classes" (PhD, male 27 years).*

Some other students felt that the combination of postgraduate and undergraduate students was improper because of the differences in academic schedule and the age difference. Undergraduates have a fixed timetable, which ends at 3 pm while that of graduates is variable depending on the department and schedule of professors. This made it difficult for graduates to stick to the schedule of Persian language classes.



*"The College should find a way of making postgraduate classes special so that it will not be in conjunction with the undergraduate students because the schedule of undergraduate students is according to their own academic timetable. So if postgraduates combine with undergraduate students in the same classes it becomes very difficult for postgraduates to cope with attendance in class" (MSC Male 31 years).*

*"I was holding a managerial position in my country and I was joining with 17 or 20 years in the same class and sometimes I had difficulty in talking in class, most especially I don't understand the Persian language" (PhD female 34 years).*

One participant had a contrary view regarding the age variations of students in a class. He said that age does not matter in the learning environment:

*"I think both categories are the same but it only has to do with only some mental concept that these people are more experienced than others" (PhD male 36 years).*

With respect to the method of teaching, participants recounted how difficult it was that instructors taught the Persian language using the same language, and they found it very difficult:

*"They were teaching the Persian language by using Persian to teach Persian without any translation whatsoever or any kind of examples to illustrate in a familiar language so which meant that there was absolutely no way I was going to learn Persian from Persian" (PhD male 32 years).*

One of the participants said that the right method to teach language is by speaking the same language to learners. Nevertheless, instructors should be considerate on this principle:

*"I think when you are teaching languages you are supposed to speak the language you are teaching, but I thought they should give concessions to the fact that there are some of us that are very new to the Persian language so they should be soft with us" (PhD female 45 years).*

### **3.5 Suggestions to improve the teaching and learning of Persian language**

Participants made some suggestions which, when implemented, will increase the chances of International graduate students of Tehran University of Medical Sciences to learn the Persian language. These suggestions are; separation of graduate students, reducing the duration of classes per week, improving the content and methods of teaching and students should develop inner motivation for learning the language.

*"postgraduate students' classes should be separated from undergraduate students, the second is that the international college should look at the structure of postgraduates classes and make sure that the language classes time does not coincide with their lectures" (MSC male, 31 years).*

Some of the participants added that postgraduates only need to learn and engage in a meaningful conversation but not to write or learn a technical and complex aspect of the language. One of them states that there should be no exams at all:

*"There should be a separate class for graduate students, there should be less duration of time, for example, one hour is enough because we don't need too much of the language, grammar or use of tenses is not very mandatory for us. If they can arrange to practice us how to speak, normal like present tense or future tenses. There should be no exam at all" (PhD Female 28 years).*

Another participant phrased it as:

*"postgraduates are not going to use the Persian language extensively it is just for conversation, so I would rather they teach not from the grammar perspective and not too strict*

*in the Persian language perspective. It should be taken from familiar alphabets just to help conversational skills not to have this kind of writing competencies, but for conversational purposes” (PhD male 32 years).*

There is a consensus in participants view on the reduction of contact hours for graduate students. However, their views are varied regarding the duration, some recommend 1 hour per session, others 2 hours per session and some two hours per week;

*“I will be able to showcase the language to other people and the only motivation is when the number of hours is reduced so that at least one will be comfortable to sit for a maximum of two hours anything outside the two hours it'll be difficult to concentrate” (PhD male 33 years).*

Some other suggestions, which emerged during our face-to-face interview, were that international campus where the language is taught, could design an online learning system for postgraduates to learn at their own pace and in the comfort of their homes;

*“In my personal opinion, if they could probably get some of this curriculum to be in such a way that people can learn online because sometimes booking somebody to be there for four hours it's not that easy” (PhD male 36 years).*

Another suggestion was that the international campus should admit students and give an adjustment period of three months within which time postgraduates were supposed to attend Persian classes as part of their adjustment process.

*“I would like to suggest if it is possible they can give admission to students so that students can come even with the best efforts within 3 months one can get a good grip of the Persian language if you are dedicated” (PhD male 34 years)*

Another participant added that *“.....And students are not supposed to start formal studies within this period” (PhD male 36 years).*

#### **4. DISCUSSIONS**

The perspectives of International postgraduate students studying medical and allied health science programmes at Tehran University of Medical Sciences regarding the learning of the Persian language has been well articulated in this study. The results show that all international postgraduate students have an interest in learning the Persian language, even though, it is not compulsory for them. The benefits of learning a new language in a new environment were highlighted such as to enable students to participate fully in clinical activities, integrate well into the community, learn and appreciate cultural diversity and to express themselves in public places for example when they go shopping. Archibald et al (2006) also express this in their study when they reviewed the literature on second language learning. They stated that the benefits of learning a second language are numerous including cognitive advantages that can arise from achieving a particular level of proficiency in a second language. **This finding agrees with recent studies, which observed bilingual cognitive advantages in people who learn second languages and support the assertion that experience with dual language influences the central executive control system which regulates processing across a wide range of task(13).** Learning about other **people's** cultures and other languages broadens the mind and exposure to these other languages enhances cultural awareness (2) **which enhances adaptation and reduces acculturation stress (14).** **A global citizen is an individual who speaks multiple languages, understands different cultures, has no prejudice and respects diversity, willing to help those in need and is informed about what is going on in their country and/or the world (15).** Therefore **learning a second language is the beginning of global citizenship.**

Most of the international postgraduate students started attending the Persian language classes organized by the International Campus of Tehran University of Medical Sciences. Persian language

proficiency was generally low among graduate students because of the difficulties they face, combining their mandatory classes with the Persian language classes. The difficulty adults face in learning a new language is also reported by Soskey, Holcomb and Midgley(5). Females showed higher Persian language proficiency than their male counterparts. This finding is also consistent with other findings in second language acquisition worldwide(16). The highest-level International graduates reached with the Persian language classes **were** the completion of the first of six levels.

International students' inability to speak and understand the Persian language has an influence on their academic activities. Such influence as expressed by students includes challenges with communicating with some administrative staffs in order to schedule appointment and classes with professors, seeking help from laboratory assistants, and knowledge sharing among International postgraduates and Iranian students. The Persian language also affected students who undertook an internship. They expressed the difficulty in the field because they could not speak and understand the Persian language. Some students felt they were not treated fairly because of their inability to speak and understand the Persian language. This finding is in line with Xu, Gutierrez and Kim (3) where nurses felt marginalized, discriminated and poorly treated. This perceived injustice was partly because they had difficulties in expressing themselves and advocating for their rights. In extreme cases, international nurses had to resort to legal actions against discrimination.

A few professors prefer to teach more students, so a department with one international student may have to join Iranian students for lectures. This arrangement would mean that the professor would have to switch between Persian and English languages in class for the Iranian and International postgraduate students respectively. Some of the challenges International students expressed regarding the learning of the Persian language at the international College include mixing of postgraduates and undergraduate students. This creates age variation between postgraduates and undergraduates in the same class. Therefore, postgraduates may feel shy to participate in class. This is in line with Jeong et al's work(4), who said that age difference reduces the confidence and motivation of students to participate in class. **However, since the teaching instructions were explicit and all participants were adults, the learning environment was balanced with respect to age. Therefore, the age difference should not be a predictor of motivation to learn the Persian language. Lichtman states that explicit instruction affects children and adults in the same way, supporting the hypothesis that age differences in explicit learning are not exclusively caused by maturation, but influenced by instruction(17).** Some other challenges were the duration of sessions per day, the academic workload of graduates, conflict of Persian language classes with other compulsory classes and Persian language content and teaching methods. Undergraduates have a fixed timetable for their academic courses, which ends at 3 pm while that of postgraduates is variable depending on the department and schedule of professors. This made it difficult for graduates to stick to the schedule of Persian language classes.

Suggestions to improve learning of the Persian language by International postgraduate students of Tehran University of Medical Sciences include the separation of graduate students from undergraduates, reducing the duration and number of classes per week, revising the teaching content and methods for postgraduates. Graduate students only need to learn the Persian language in order to engage in meaningful conversation but not to write or learn a technical and complex aspect of the language because they have a relatively short period of stay as defined by their courses. **Learning conversational skill can be enhanced by using music as part of the teaching strategy (18,19), watching TV shows or movies, downloading apps to help in practice talk to native speakers and online learning (20)**

The University of Medical Sciences-International Campus gives an adjustment period of three months for new International graduate students, within which time students are supposed to attend special Persian classes for communication purposes. It would be of utmost importance if University authorities design assessment forms for students to respond periodically in order to identify the

challenges they face at the university in order for authorities design pragmatic interventions to overcome such challenges.

## **5. STRENGTHS OF THE STUDY**

This is the first study conducted to assess the perspectives of medical and allied health science graduate students regarding the learning of Persian language. The findings offer interesting perspectives to the discourse on postgraduates' perspectives on learning the Persian language and its effect on the teaching and learning process at Tehran University of Medical Sciences. It is hoped that the findings of this study will help educators, administrators, international postgraduate students and TUMS to conceptualise better strategies for solving the Persian language difficulties and associated learning problems of international students.

## **6. STUDY LIMITATIONS**

Since all the participants in this study were Postgraduates in Tehran University of Medical Sciences-International Campus, the findings cannot be generalized to other International student populations.

## **7. CONCLUSIONS**

International medical and allied health science graduate students have an interest in learning the Persian language, even though, it is not compulsory for them. **Persian language proficiency was generally low among graduate student. However, female students showed higher Persian language proficiency than their male counterparts. We found that international Students low proficiency in the Persian language affected their academic work. The effect was minimal since most of the students were able to find a way around some of the challenges. Separating graduate students from undergraduates, reducing the duration and number of classes per week, and revising the content and teaching methods of Persian language according to the need of graduate students could motivate international graduate students to learn the Persian language. We recommend further studies on teaching strategies that could be employed to improve the teaching of the Persian language and to ascertain the practicality of online teaching for postgraduate international students.**

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## **COMPETING INTERESTS**

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

## **AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTION**

Author IY conceptualized the idea, designed the study, conducted the interviews, transcribed the data, and compiled the first version of the article. Author ES supervised the work at every stage of the research process and provided appropriate scholarly input. Author SM managed the literature search and discussion of the findings. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

## **CONSENT**

Participants consented for this study to be published. They voluntarily agreed to participate

## **ETHICAL APPROVAL**

The study objectives and designed was explained on a telegram group of International graduate students of TUMs. Participants who expressed interest on the group platform were contacted at their

convenient time for the interview. Participants were assured that their names would not be used and the researchers maintained confidentiality. Before data collection, written informed consent was obtained from each participant. The study was performed in accordance with the ethical standards laid down in the 1964 Declaration of Helsinki.

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