




Original Article

# Exploring English Language Learning Needs of Pakistani ESL Postgraduate Research Students: A Qualitative Study

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## Abstract

*English has gained supremacy as the primary language in a range of domains including business, science, technology, higher education, and research. This dominance has created a necessity for a curriculum that meets learners' needs. In Pakistan, postgraduate students face challenges related to the English language in coursework, research paper writing, and dissertation preparation. The objective of this research was to examine the English language requirements of potential Pakistani postgraduate students, who were pursuing studies in science disciplines. The sample included 26 prospective MS students and 4 prospective PhD students, who were preparing for admission tests. The researchers used a semi-structured questionnaire to collect the data, which had been validated by two experts. Thematic analysis revealed that the prospective postgraduate students needed reading skills for reading and comprehending research papers, followed by writing skills for research proposal writing and thesis writing. Participants also recognized the importance of speaking skills for research presentations and communication with supervisors, and listening skills for better understanding of lectures and seminars. The findings suggest that ESP learner-centered courses should be offered to Pakistani MS/MPhil and PhD candidates that focus on the four language skills for research purposes.*

**Keywords:** ESL, ESP, Need analysis, Pakistan universities, Postgraduate level

## INTRODUCTION

English has become the dominant language worldwide as the primary form of communication among individuals from diverse linguistic origins. The rise of English as a secondary or non-native language has exceeded the count of individuals, who speak it as their mother tongue (Kameda, 2001). Furthermore, numerous countries where English is not the first language have embraced it as their official language. In the context of ESL, English has become a crucial tool for students and professionals alike (Rao, 2018). In Pakistan, English proficiency has become a measure of an individual's competence for success in professional life, making the use of the English language inevitable (Fareed et al., 2021). Language also plays a vital role in the country's education system, serving as the medium of instruction in schools, colleges, and universities.

Recent studies have also highlighted the importance of English as a global language. These findings further emphasize the significance of English in a globalized world. Students require English language skills at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels in most ESL contexts; therefore, teaching and learning programs must cater to students' English language needs (Bibi & Bukhari, 2020; Fareed et al., 2021). Hence, need analysis is essential to determine the learners' English language needs. At the postgraduate level, research students require advanced English language skills, such as reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Reading comprehension skills are to review the literature. Similarly, writing skills are needed to write assignments, dissertations/ theses, and research papers. Because English is used as a medium of instruction at the postgraduate level, the learners should also have good listening and speaking skills. In addition, listening and speaking skills are also considered necessary for national and international seminars, webinars, symposia, and conferences.

Many universities in ESL and EFL contexts focus on the enrolled and prospective students' English language skills. Analysis can be vital in providing the learners with the required skills. Therefore, many research programs conduct needs analysis to determine their English language requirements for the programs. In Pakistan, several studies have been conducted to ascertain the needs of learners in this particular field (Ahsan et al., 2012; Channa et al., 2013; Khalid, 2016). This research aimed to investigate the English language prerequisites for prospective graduate students from Pakistan who plan to pursue advanced studies in scientific fields, such as MS/MPhil and PhD programs, at a public sector university situated in Karachi. Specifically, the study sought to identify areas where these students face challenges with their English language skills, coursework, research paper writing, and dissertation writing. The ultimate objective of the study was to recommend learner-centered language courses tailored to students' needs, allowing teachers and institutions to provide customized courses that enhance their English language proficiency for research purposes.

## Research Question

- What are the English language needs of prospective Pakistani ESL MPhil and PhD students enrolled in science disciplines?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### English for Specific Purposes

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) is a discipline that focuses on the specific language needs of learners in their chosen fields. In the context of Pakistani ESL postgraduate research students, understanding their language needs is crucial for effective language instruction. As Belcher (2013) notes, ESP theory and practice are essential in providing tailored language instruction to meet the needs of specific learners. It is essential to conduct English language needs analysis for Pakistani ESL postgraduate research students, considering ESP research and practices. The needs analysis process involves identifying the learners' language needs in their specific fields of study, including the language used in academic research and writing (Swales & Feak, 2012). This information can create an ESP curriculum tailored to the learners' needs and interests (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987; Azam & Asim, 2023).

Paltridge and Starfield (2016) emphasize that ESP covers various genres and contexts, including academic writing, research papers, and conference presentations; therefore, needs analysis should involve an in-depth analysis of the language needed to develop appropriate curricula and instructional materials. This analysis may include identifying the language features required for effective communication in academic research and writing, such as academic vocabulary, sentence structures, and citation practices. Conducting needs analysis for Pakistani ESL postgraduate research students is crucial to developing effective ESP instruction materials. By incorporating the insights and recommendations of Hutchinson and Waters (1987) and Paltridge and Starfield (2016), instructors can develop a curriculum that meets the learners' specific language needs and prepares them for success in their fields of study.

### English for Academic Purposes

Language and communication abilities are crucial in higher education (Aliakbari & Boghayeri, 2014). Formerly recognised as English for Educational Purposes (EEP), English for Academic Purposes (EAP) has emerged as a popular field of study; this can be attributed to the fact that there is no one-size-fits-all approach or material for English language teaching that caters to learners from diverse backgrounds and with varying needs. ESP courses were found to lack generalizability by some researchers, creating an opportunity for the development of EAP. In a needs analysis conducted in Hong Kong, Evans and Green (2007) discovered that most undergraduates wanted language support targeted towards academics rather than general English. EAP is defined by Sager, (1994) as students' need for "quick and economical use of the English language to undertake a program of academic study" (p.4). Meanwhile, Zhu and Flaitz (2005) regard EAP as having a critical role in supporting students to improve their English language skills, which will contribute to their academic pursuits.

In the 1980s, EAP and EOP (English for Occupational Purposes) were considered single entities. It is evident in Carver's (1983) classification of three types of ESP: 'English as a Restricted Language', 'English for Academic and Occupational Purposes', and 'English with Specific Topics'. Hutchinson and Waters (1987) also support this notion and argue that there is no clear distinction between EAP and EOP because many learners may work and study simultaneously and the language learned for immediate use in a study environment may later be used in their profession. Thus, it can be inferred that both EAP and EOP aim to prepare learners for their future careers. However, some ESP researchers, such as Sabariah and Rafik-Galea (2005) and Jordan (1997) reject this idea.

### EAP in Higher Education

EAP has gained a significant role and position not only in native English-speaking countries, but also in the regions where English is a second language or a medium of instruction in tertiary-level institutions (Jordan, 1997). Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998) outline four types of EAP situations at the tertiary level and confirm that "An English-speaking country such as the UK or USA has an ESL situation, such as in former British colonies in Africa or Southeast Asia; a situation where certain subjects are taught in English and the remaining in the national language" (p.34).

At the tertiary level, the needs of learners/students vary according to geographical requirements. EAP caters to the needs of these particular groups of students. For instance, in Pakistan, English is the official language of the elites, and most of the educational instruction and instructional materials at the tertiary level is in English (Fareed et al., 2021). EAP classes are often necessary and sometimes compulsory for students

from different disciplines (Liyanage & Birch, 2001). Liyanage and Birch (2001) argue that English for General Academic Purposes (EGAP) would meet the needs of such a diverse group of students better than English for Specific Academic Purposes (ESAP). This argument is based on the idea that EAP courses aim for generalized objectives after identifying students' needs. Many researchers have discussed the role and development of EAP in higher education. Mo (2005) suggests that in the future, there will be a shift in emphasis towards EAP at pre-tertiary levels because early exposure to EAP will provide a strong foundation for academic English and help students become more proficient at higher levels. Jordan (1997) supports this argument by emphasizing that EAP curriculum, which aims to meet the needs of students taking advanced study courses at the university level, must presuppose solid literacy abilities.

In determining the content of an ESP/EAP syllabus, it is crucial to consider the specific needs of the target situation as suggested by Hutchinson and Waters (1987). This sentiment is echoed by more recent researchers, such as Paltridge and Starfield (2016), who emphasize the importance of needs analysis in designing an effective ESP/EAP curriculum. The idea that ESP/EAP content is not fixed, but evolves to meet changing communication needs in various contexts is supported by Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998). According to Paltridge and Starfield (2016), ESP/EAP programs should not be limited to a specific set of language features, but should aim to develop learners' communicative competence in their particularly academic or professional contexts. This aligns with the view that ESP/EAP is a process of "making language teaching more relevant to the needs of the learners" (Basturkmen, 2010, p. 3).

Therefore, an ESP/EAP syllabus should be dynamic and responsive to the changing needs of learners, which can be achieved through ongoing needs analysis and evaluation of the program's effectiveness (Hyland, 2006). As such, an ESP/EAP curriculum should be seen as a flexible framework that allows for adaptation and customization to suit the specific needs of learners in different academic or professional contexts.

## Needs Analysis

Needs analysis is recommended to be the first step in language program development (Benavent & Sánchez-Reyes, 2015). As regularly articulated in ESP literature, needs analysis is the core of ESP education (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987; Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998; Belcher et al., 2011). According to Hyland (2006), needs analysis tries to establish the how and what of a course. Needs can involve what learners know, what they don't know, or desire to know. Needs analysis is often ignored in ESL and EFL course design (Cowling, 2007), which can compromise effective teaching and learning. Therefore, in developing a curriculum for a language course, needs analysis should be conducted to know the learners' language needs and accordingly design the curriculum to meet their requirements.

Robinson (1991) reiterates that the analysis of learners' needs should consider their current language proficiency and their anticipated language requirements. This analysis involves two stages: Present Situation Analysis (PSA), which aims to determine students' existing language abilities and needs at the beginning of the course, and Target Situation Analysis (TSA), which focuses on identifying the language requirements that students will need in their future academic or professional contexts.

### *Present Situation Analysis*

Present Situation Analysis (PSA) identifies where the learners stand at the beginning of the language course. It helps gauge strengths and weaknesses in learners' language skills and experiences. The PSA stakeholders include learners, teachers, and institution management (Jordan, 1997). The current situation needs analysis can be done through an established placement test. Further demographic and personal information about learners can give enough data to formulate and predict their present needs.

### *Target Situation Needs Analysis*

Munby (1978) places learners' purpose in the centre of the needs analysis framework, placing the notion of target needs in the leading position. Target Situation Needs Analysis (TSA) aims at the learners' needs at the end of the course because its ultimate purpose is to train the participants for authentic communication in the target field. Accurate materials and task-based activities are recommended (Benavent, Sanchez-Reyes, 2015). Jordan (1997) states that its primary concern is arranging and organizing materials for designing the communicative syllabus. TSA and PSA can work together to better understand the needs analysis, especially in ESP. It seems apparent that one cannot rely on only TSA or PSA. All stakeholders should be involved and available tools must be used to get reliable indicators of what is needed to enhance learning and reach the desired goals.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The purpose of this qualitative study is to conduct a needs analysis of the English language needs of postgraduate students using structured interview questions. The use of a qualitative approach allowed for a deep understanding of the subjective experiences and perceptions of the participants (Creswell, 2013). This section outlines the methodology used for the study, including the research design, participants, data collection, and data analysis. The study employed a qualitative research design to explore the English language needs of postgraduate students, focusing on their subjective experiences and perceptions. Following Creswell's (2013) recommendations, qualitative research was deemed suitable for understanding complex phenomena and participant perspectives. Structured interview questions, derived from the literature review and expert opinion were utilized to ensure a systematic data collection and uniformity in questioning as supported by Maxwell (2012).

The present study involved students attending English enhancement courses at a public sector University in Karachi. A purposive sampling technique was used to select participants from the science discipline, which were most relevant to the research question (Flick, 2018). The sample consisted of 26 prospective MS students and four prospective PhD students preparing for the programs' admission tests. Data were collected through a semi-structured questionnaire comprising 12 questions developed and validated in three stages. First, the questionnaire was developed based on a thorough literature review. Second, the authors validated the tool for self-validity. Finally, feedback from two experts in the field was sought and necessary changes were made to ensure the validity and reliability of the questionnaire (Braun & Clarke, 2019). Informed consent was obtained from the participants before data collection, and the collected data were used only for research purposes, as assured to the participants. Participants and institutional confidentiality were maintained to ensure ethical considerations (Guest et al., 2012).

### **Data Collection & Analysis**

The present study employed structured interviews as the primary data collection method. The interviews were administered in a written form, allowing participants to take their time to answer each question. The interview questions were structured and focused on identifying the specific English language needs of the participants. These needs included reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills and perceived challenges or barriers to learning English.

Thematic analysis was used to analyse the qualitative data obtained from the interviews. According to Braun and Clarke (2019) and Nowell et al., (2017), thematic analysis is a commonly used approach in qualitative research for identifying patterns and themes within the data. This method involved reviewing interview responses and identifying recurring patterns and emerging themes about the participants' English language needs and challenges. The data collected from the interviews were analysed using a thematic analysis approach. The data were transcribed and organized into themes and sub-themes based on the research questions and objectives. The themes were then compared and contrasted to identify patterns and trends in the data. Two independent researchers analysed the results to ensure inter-reliability and consistency in the findings. According to Guest et al. (2012), inter-rater reliability is essential in qualitative research to ensure that the results are consistent and valid.

## **RESULTS & FINDINGS**

The present study yielded significant insights pertaining to English language needs of Pakistani ESL postgraduate research students, considering that English is the primary language of instruction and communication in higher education institutions. The participants' responses highlight the vital role of English language proficiency in various academic tasks, such as presenting, writing research papers, conducting literature surveys, and designing theses or articles (SP 3). Furthermore, the participants' responses emphasized the importance of reading library books and listening to lectures in English (SP 3, 4, 6). The participants also acknowledged the significance of developing essential academic skills throughout their postgraduate studies, as all these skills require English language proficiency (SP 12).

These findings are consistent with the existing literature on ESP, which stresses the need for language programs to be tailored to the specific needs of the learners (Benavent & Sanchez-Reyes, 2015). Moreover, they underline the crucial role of needs analysis in developing effective language programs (Belcher et al., 2006; Evans & St John, 1998; Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). The findings also align with recent research highlighting the importance of English language proficiency in tertiary education settings (Humphreys, 2022).

Overall, the study's findings emphasize the critical role of English language proficiency in postgraduate studies and highlight the need for English language programs tailored to the specific needs of Pakistani ESL postgraduate research students.

### **Purpose of Reading Skill**

Based on data analysis, it is evident that reading skill plays a vital role in the postgraduate studies of the participants. One participant (SP 14) stated:

"Reading skills are required for books, newspapers, etc."

(SP 3) indicated the importance of reading skill in academic and non-academic contexts.

(SP 5) recognized the need for critical reading and understanding, as understanding the topic and drawing conclusions were deemed necessary.

(SP 12) indicated that comprehension of the correct meaning of any text was essential, whether the information was presented explicitly or the reader must infer a conclusion. Thus, the findings suggest that postgraduate students need strong academic reading skills.

### **Purpose of Writing Skill**

The study findings revealed that the participants recognized various purposes of writing skills at the tertiary level, with four primary purposes emerging from the data analysis, including:

(SP 3, 8, 10, 15) agreed that academic writing was extremely vital, which included writing essay synopsis, dissertations, research papers, review papers, and communicating with professors for potential collaboration.

(SP 9, 14, 18, 22, 26) agreed that effective message conveyance, especially while working with foreign collaborators and in the context of thesis writing, was another significant purpose of writing skills.

(SP 2, 6, 29) emphasized the necessity of writing skills for academic assessments, such as examinations and viva exams, and for giving presentations.

Notably, the importance of writing skills extended beyond the academic context, with some participants emphasizing the need for personal and professional development.

(SP 16) stressed that writing skill was necessary for writing letters, applications, and proposals.

(SP 27) was of the opinion that writing skill was essential for career growth.

(SP 13) articulated that writing skill was necessary for engaging in social and political discourse.

In summary, the data analysis underscores the multifaceted nature of writing skill at the tertiary level. The findings suggest that academic institutions should prioritize developing students' writing skill to prepare them for academic success, personal and professional development, and social and political engagement.

### **Purpose of Speaking Skill**

After analysing the data, it became apparent that the participants in the study placed great importance on speaking skill at the tertiary level for various purposes. The most commonly purpose was to present their thesis, research articles, conferences, interviews, and viva.

(SP 27) expressed the need for speaking skill during presentations and seminars, interviews, final viva, and thesis defense. Effective communication in these situations is crucial for academic success and professional advancement.

Additionally, the participants recognized the need for effective communication with supervisors and foreign colleagues.

(SP 22) highlighted that speaking skills are required to communicate with the supervisor or with foreigners when applying for higher studies. Furthermore, the participant noted the importance of speaking skills for collaborating with colleagues from diverse backgrounds.

These findings suggest that speaking skills are vital in building professional relationships and networking opportunities in the academic world.

(SP 5) identified the need for speaking skills to confidently express her thoughts and opinions in academic discussions and debates. The participant stated that speaking skill is essential for the explanation of ideas effectively, discussion regarding experiments, and other academic matters.

Effective communication and collaboration are critical for academic success and for building a career in

academia. Therefore, developing speaking skill is crucial for learners to succeed academically.

In summary, the study revealed that speaking skill is essential for various purposes at the tertiary level, such as presenting research work, communicating with colleagues and supervisors, pursuing higher studies abroad, and expressing thoughts and opinions confidently in academic discussions and debates. The skill is crucial for learners to succeed in the academic world and build professional relationships.

### **Purpose of Listening Skill**

The study findings revealed that the participants recognized the importance of listening skills for various purposes in academic settings. One of the most highlighted purposes was to understand and absorb course content during lectures and tutorials.

(SP 11, 20) stated that listening skills are required to comprehend the meaning of the words used in lectures, to note down important points and understand the scientific terms and theories discussed in class. This statement highlights the critical role of listening skill for academic success. Additionally, the participants identified the importance of listening skill to improve their communication skills. They noted that listening skill is crucial for improving pronunciation, vocabulary, and speaking skills.

(SP 19, 22) added that listening skill was essential to understand pronunciation and use them with correct pronunciation when speaking.

The results of this study indicate that developing listening skills is crucial for achieving academic success and personal and professional growth.

(SP 25) identified the need for listening skills for research purposes. He mentioned that she had to listen to interviews, recordings, and conversations related to the research.

These findings suggest that listening skills are crucial for conducting research and gathering information effectively. The data analysis highlights the importance of listening skill for academic success, personal and professional development, and research purposes.

Listening skill is crucial for learners to comprehend course material effectively, improve communication skills, and conduct research. These findings suggest that academic institutions should prioritize developing learners' listening skills to enhance their academic and professional prospects.

### **Problems in Speaking English during Postgraduate Studies**

On analysing the data, it was found that the respondents faced various challenges related to listening skills. One of the most commonly mentioned problems was difficulty in understanding and communicating with foreigners. Several participants expressed their struggle with comprehending the accents and speech patterns of individuals from different linguistic backgrounds, which hindered their communication ability (SP 4, 7, 11). Lack of vocabulary was also identified as a significant barrier to effective listening and communication. Some participants noted that they struggled to express their ideas clearly because they did not have relevant and sufficient words to convey their intended meaning. As one participant explained:

"I do not get any ideas to speak on a given topic and I have some vocabulary problems, which may be the reason I speak less" (SP 1).

Others connected vocabulary deficits with a lack of confidence, which could lead to nervousness and stuttering during speaking. Fear and a lack of fluency were also identified as critical challenges in developing listening skills. Some respondents expressed anxiety about engaging in academic or social discussions, which could prevent them from actively participating or understanding the conversations.

Moreover, (SP 10) highlighted:

"The importance of a good accent for effective communication is adamant and I always have this idea that I may be mispronouncing words or use incorrect grammar and thus stay away from conversations.

These findings suggest that academic institutions should prioritize the development of listening skills to support learners in overcoming the above challenges to enhance their communication abilities.

### **Problems in Presenting a Research Paper**

The study reveals several factors that hinder the respondents' speaking fluency and confidence while presenting papers. One of the significant factors is the lack of vocabulary, which makes it difficult for participants to find appropriate words and sentences to convey their ideas effectively. SP 2 noted:

"I struggle to find the right words and sentences to express my ideas effectively."

Additionally, SP 5 shared that their limited vocabulary and shyness make them feel less confident when presenting.

Another factor that impacts participants' confidence is their accents. Almost all participants were hesitant due to the fear of mispronouncing words and being judged for their accents. This fear is exacerbated when they struggle to find appropriate words to convey their ideas effectively. The study highlights the need for learners to develop their vocabulary and pronunciation skills to increase their confidence while presenting.

In conclusion, the study accentuates the importance of vocabulary and accent in hindering the fluency and confidence of learners while presenting papers. Therefore, addressing these issues and providing learners with appropriate resources to enhance their listening and speaking skills is crucial. By doing so, learners can overcome such obstacles and develop better fluency and confidence in their presentation skills.

### **Problems in Reading English / Research Article**

The participants in the study identified lack of understanding of complex vocabulary as a significant challenge hindering their reading and comprehension skills. Some respondents expressed difficulty comprehending research articles. SP 4 and 7 expressed that:

"Reading and understanding research articles is difficult due to difficult and technical vocabulary. This impedes my comprehension and at times I have to read each paragraph a couple of times."

SP 25 expressed that:

"Sometimes scientific terms and contextual meaning of words create problems."

SP 14 stated:

"Some words are new to me, others I have read, but don't remember the meaning or partly remember the meaning."

SP 14 shared that research articles were particularly challenging due to their complex vocabulary, with some participants indicating the need to use a dictionary to understand certain words.

SP 16 stated:

"Although most of the papers I understand completely, sometimes the long sentences pose problems."

Finally, many participants cited a lack of interest in reading and slow reading speed as additional barriers to comprehension.

### **Problems in Writing**

Most participants in the study reported facing writing difficulties due to insufficient vocabulary.

SP 3, 6, 8, 10, 12, 13 and many others shared that they didn't find the right and exact words to explain or describe what they actually wanted to write in the paper or to summarize abstracts and articles. Additionally, grammar and low vocabulary posed significant challenges for several respondents. Confusion in sentence structure stood out quite prominently.

Fourteen participants reported facing problems while writing research papers. Insufficient vocabulary, sentence structures, and difficulty in organizing information were cited as factors that make it challenging to compose an essay or article. Furthermore, SP2, 17, and 14 highlighted the importance of clarity in expression as a major hindrance in the flow of writing, with SP 17 noting that problems in sorting and compiling information can lead to writer's block and make writing difficult.

The findings indicate that a lack of vocabulary and difficulty with grammar are significant obstacles to effective writing. These issues are compounded by challenges in sentence structure and the organization of ideas. Ensuring clarity in expression is also crucial for effective writing, as inadequate information compilation can lead to writer's block and other writing difficulties.

### **Problems in Listening**

As listening is an active skill, most learners identified that they need listening to understand lecturers and foreigners interacting with them in webinars or online lectures. Fourteen identified that they do not understand the accent. SP 5 and 18 shared:

"I've attended many online seminars and conferences, but fail to understand what the speakers are saying, because of multiple reasons.

## **Discussion**

The present study highlights the importance of providing language support tailored explicitly for academic English, as echoed by Evans and Green (2007) and Sager (1994). The respondents identified the need for speaking skills for academic purposes, including presentations, research articles, conferences, interviews, thesis defenses, and communication with supervisors and foreigners. Lack of vocabulary and fluency were identified as significant obstacles to effective communication, consistent with previous research (Jin & Cortazzi, 1998; Nation & Nation, 2001).

Moreover, the study's findings emphasize the importance of conducting a needs analysis before course planning at the postgraduate level in Pakistan, as suggested by Cowling (2007). Needs analysis can provide valuable insights into students' specific language needs and help design tailored language courses. Furthermore, the needs analysis framework proposed by Munby (1978) can help identify learners' target needs and can help design language courses that are relevant and useful for their academic pursuits. Recent studies also support the importance of conducting a needs analysis to provide adequate language instruction to learners.

It can be summed up that the present study contributes to the existing literature on language needs analysis by highlighting the specific language needs of postgraduate students in Pakistan. The study underscores the importance of providing language support tailored to academic English and conducting a needs analysis before course planning, which can be achieved by incorporating needs analysis frameworks such as Munby's (1978) into a language course

## **CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, this study sheds light on the critical role of English language proficiency in the academic success of postgraduate students, particularly in ESL contexts. The study results indicate that a comprehensive needs analysis is essential to identify specific language needs and challenges. To address these challenges, educational institutions must implement language support programs, use authentic academic materials, provide regular feedback and evaluation, and train instructors to support the development of language skills in their students. Therefore, involving all stakeholders in a thorough needs analysis that employs various tools to gather accurate data and achieve desired outcomes is imperative. By adopting these recommendations, institutions can offer adequate support to ESL postgraduate research students and enhance their academic performance, contributing to the growth of science and technology in Pakistan.

## **Recommendations**

Based on previous discussions, it is clear that Pakistani ESL prospective research students face various challenges in pursuing postgraduate studies, primarily related to their English language skills. Therefore, it is necessary to consider the following recommendations to enhance the English language skills of ESL postgraduate research students:

- Institutions offering postgraduate studies should conduct a comprehensive needs analysis to identify ESL research students' specific challenges and needs. The needs analysis will help them develop a curriculum that addresses those needs and provides adequate student support.
- Institutions should provide language support programs that cater to the specific needs of ESL research students. These programs should improve students' reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills to enhance academic performance.
- Using original educational materials in language support programs can help students become familiar with the language and style of academic writing. It can also help them develop the academic literacy skills required for postgraduate studies.
- Institutions should provide regular feedback and evaluation to ESL research students to help them monitor their progress and identify areas for improvement, which can help students feel motivated and encouraged to continue working on their language skills.
- Instructors and tutors working with ESL research students should receive appropriate training to support the development of language skills in their students, which can include training on how to teach academic writing, provide feedback, and assess language proficiency.

## Pedagogical Implications

Previous research has consistently emphasized the crucial role of English language skills in the success of postgraduate studies, particularly in ESL contexts. For instance, it is highlighted the importance of bilingual children's mother tongue for academic achievement, while Grabe and Stoller (2011) emphasize the significance of reading skills in academic success.

Furthermore, to support the English language development of postgraduate students in ESL contexts, institutions offering postgraduate studies should provide language support programs, utilize authentic academic materials, offer regular feedback and evaluation, and train instructors to support the development of language skills. Therefore, conducting a comprehensive needs analysis involving all stakeholders and utilizing all available tools is essential to obtain accurate indicators of what is required to achieve desired goals. By implementing these recommendations, institutions can provide adequate support to ESL postgraduate research students and enhance their academic performance. As Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998) and Hutchinson and Waters (1987) have previously emphasized, a learning-centered and multidisciplinary approach incorporating needs analysis, curriculum development, and materials design is essential to support the English language development of postgraduate students effectively.

TSA and PSA may work together to understand the need analysis better at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels. One cannot rely on only TSA or PSA (Long & Crookes, 1992; Nunan, 1988; Siddiqua, et al., 2014). All stakeholders should be involved and all the available tools must be used to get reliable indicators of what is needed to enhance learning and reach the desired goals (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987).

## Competing Interest

The authors had no competing interests.

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