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RESEARCH PAPER

Academic English Language for Social Sciences Learners: A Case Study of Bahauddin Zakariya University, Multan

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PAPER INFO	ABSTRACT
	This study is twofold in nature. The intent of undertaken research is to probe out the academic English language needs and to suggest a course to cater the academic needs of the social sciences learners of Bahauddin Zakariya University, Multan and to. Taking insights from the theory of ESP and EAP, needs analysis is carried out. In this regard, the data was collected through interviews from fifteen instructors of three disciplines: Economics, Education and Mass Communication; to judge the existing level of students' competence and their requirements. Key points of the data were evaluated qualitatively by conferring the themes. Findings about the present situation analysis revealed the low proficiency of the learners to cope up the target situations. So, in light of the existing situations of learners regarding Academic English Language needs, a course is suggested to revamp the learning of social sciences learners.

Introduction

The contemporary Academic revolution at higher education has been confronting challenges with reference to adjusting with academic requirements, administering with their time, and acquiring more liability for gaining their knowledge. This shift has been challenging for first year aspirants of social sciences disciplines to cope up the academic needs. The major concern of the aspirants is to cope up the academic needs with reference to their English Language. In this regard, 'universities are urged to design strategies in order to increase learners' English Language competence for academic and professional settings' (Zafar, 2008,

p. 23), that reflects the discontentment with the present scenario regarding English language competency of the learners.

The Bahauddin Zakariya University is a public university situated in South Punjab. It is one of the leading universities of Pakistan and caters to the academic needs of more than 20 thousand students including its distance learning program. The university has number of disciplines both in sciences and social sciences. The students hail from multiple educational milieus i.e., from English medium and Urdu medium educational institutions. Similarly, in their past, they have been recipients of English language teaching programs of different kinds, i.e. through *Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)* and *Grammar Translation Method (GTM).* Majority had studied through GTM.

In the year 2009, the Bahauddin Zakariya University made a major policy change with reference to the medium of instruction in the social sciences departments. Through which, English was adopted as an obligatory means of instruction for degree programs. In this context, an English Language Centre was established that provideed assistance to the students of these departments in connection with their English language skills in the university. However, empirical evidence related to the students required competence and the existing competence is not available. To fill this gap, the present research has been carried out. This paper takes into account students' level of competence in relation to reading, writing, speaking and listening skills. So this study intends to explore: the current level of learners' competence and their requirements pertaining to skills.

Literature Review

The literature has been reviewed in two segments.

Essentials of English for Academic Purposes (EAP)

With the viewpoint of Jordan (1997), Johnson & Johnson (1998), Flowerdew & Peacock (2001) *English for academic purposes (EAP) is* considered as the English used in academic setting to enhance the proficiency in language skills at higher level to cope up the academic needs. The academic needs are concerned with basic skills to perform the assigned tasks. The study skills are considered as ingredients of EAP course. EAP course incorporates study skills: reading writing, speaking and listening with particular strategies and techniques to cope up the particular academic settings (Richards, Platt & Platt, 2000). EAP is not only concerned with language use, but also with the language learning. For learning a language, an approach is proposed by Hutchin & Water (1987), termed as '*Learning Centered Approach*' which encompasses the learners' needs and motivation to attain the goals by incorporating different skills in classroom settings. In area of EAP, needs analysis is an integral part of developing the courses, teaching materials and trainings content; concerning with the identification of learners' needs to achieve the targets (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998). Different approaches of Needs

Analysis have been taken into account by Jordan (1997): *Target Situation Analysis, Present Situation Analysis, Learning–Centered Approach, strategy analysis and Means analysis*. In this study, I brought into light the present situation analysis of the social sciences learners to achieve the targets. In this context, Long (2005) argued to focus on needs analysis to make a valid and reliable research.

By keeping in view the learners' needs, courses are designed which are the significant aspect of the *ESP (English for Specific Purposes) and EAP.* Hutchinson & Waters (1987) acknowledged three kinds of courses: *language centered course design, skills centered course design and a learning centered approach.* On the other hand, Reilly (1988) mentioned different kinds of the courses along with their strengths and weakness, which are: functional/notional, structural, situational, skilled based, task based, and content bases syllabi. I have focused on the eclectic approach in order to design a course for social sciences learners. The eclectic approach pertains to the amalgam of different elements selected from different syllabi according to the needs and situation of academic settings.

Relevant Researches

Hawa (2015) executed a research to develop a course for the traffic police training program, specifically, focusing on the speaking skills by keeping in view the target situations. He followed the Nation &Macalister (2010) curriculum design and generated number of pedagogies to make them skillful. Likewise, Musikhin (2016) executed a research by conducting the needs of the scientists and engineers by using the tool of tests. His research aimed to update the manuals of the learners for four years to check their learning level and the training of the engineers with professional skills. The findings reveal the significance of ESP course for improving the proficiency of the engineers to cope up the academic and professional scenario.

Fitriya (2018) designed the material for the undergraduate students by conducting the needs analysis. Similarly, Nurliana (2019) designed material in light of ESP approach for the students of Al- Quran and Tafseer program. The implementation of this material was useful for the instructors' as well learners' learning process. Riccardi, Lightfoot, Lam et al (2020) explored the linguistic intricacy acting as a hurdle for the comprehension of first year undergraduate students of the university. They suggested how to improve scores for the non native speakers by raising the comprehension and suggesting the MCQs form of the tests. Likewise, Nauoa (2019) evaluated the linguistic capacity by using '*Doglassan theoretical framewor*' of the candidates appeared in the job test. He suggested to administrators to focus on their extent of literacy, communicative needs and proficiency level of test developers, testers and content of the tests. On the other hand, Ibrahim (2020) carried out the needs analysis of the medical students in order to develop a course by using the analytical and descriptive approach incorporating with questionnaires from teachers and students. The findings revealed wide range of issues in the current syllabus which was being

taught to them. So, he suggested new content for the students to meet the objectives of the course.

Similarly, numerous researches are conducted by other researchers for the different disciplines like Cutting (2012), Novawan, Zohro & Miqawati (2017), Cahyani, Joko & Sumardi (2018). They designed different courses by following the ESP approach.

Material and Methods

The present study determines to explore the students' competence in their language skills. For this, empirical study is designed entailing survey to get the perceptions of the teachers of social sciences departments of The Bahauddin Zakariya University, Multan. This study is qualitative in nature. Interviews were taken by seeking prior permission of fifteen teachers from following social sciences departments: Economics, Mass Communication and Education. Data was gathered from five teachers from each department. In this regard, the interview form was generated comprising of open ended questions regarding existing and required proficiency regarding English language skills of their students. Their perceptions were tabulated in the form of key words, subsequently these words were categorized into different themes under each skill; reading, writing, speaking and listening.

Analysis

The analysis has been presented into two sections: Section-A & Section-B. Section-A demonstrates the data relating to the required common competence skills of the students of Social Sciences Departments. On the other hand, section-b presents the required academic skills.

Section-A

Section-A, displays the common required skills of the learners of three departments of Social Sciences, named as Economics, Education and Mass Communication of Bahauddin Zakariya University, Multan. The common required competence entails with reading, writing, speaking and listening skills of the students.

Table No 1
Common Required Reading Skills of Social Sciences Learners

Description of Reading skills (classification)	skimming, quick reading, scanning, oral reading, silent reading, fluency, literal comprehension, critical reading, survey, recall, review, extensive reading, interpretive comprehension, reading speed
Development of Reading Skills	vocabulary building, reading rate, time check, keynotes, gist, road map, concentration

Effective Ways of Reading Skills	Enhancing vocabulary, dictionary usage, relation between information and language, summarization, compare and contrast, fact check, construction and reconstruction, synthesis, multiple viewpoints, supporting arguments; reading journals, recommended books, reference books, literary books & news paper
Reading Strategies	Context clues, activation of prior knowledge, deducing the meanings, inferences, prediction of meaning, skipping superfluous words & sentences, recognizing, manipulating and problem solving, think aloud, critical thinking, evaluate understanding
Recommendations	knowledge transferring skills, predicting the content & form, deducing from the context, distinguishing the discourse markers, identification of author's point of view, author's intent and attitude

Teachers' responses in connection with common required reading skills of the social sciences learners were categorized into following five themes as mentioned in table 1: description of reading skills, development of reading skills, effective ways of reading skills, reading strategies and recommendations. Description of reading skills pertain to skimming, quick reading, scanning, oral reading, silent reading, fluency, literal comprehension, critical reading, survey, recall, review, extensive reading, interpretive comprehension and reading speed. Moreover, development of reading skills include vocabulary building, reading rate, time check, keynotes, gist, road map, concentration. Then again, effective ways of reading skills refer to enhancing vocabulary, dictionary usage, relation between information and language, summarization, compare and contrast, fact check, construction and reconstruction, synthesis, multiple viewpoints, supporting arguments; reading journals, recommended books, reference books, literary books & news paper. Along with, required reading strategies must involve context clues, activation of prior knowledge, deducing the meanings, inferences, prediction of meaning, skipping superfluous words & sentences, recognizing, manipulating and problem solving, think aloud, critical thinking, evaluate understanding. Besides, suggested recommendations are knowledge transferring skills, predicting the content & form, deducing from the linguistic environment, distinguishing the discourse markers, recognizing author's point of view, author's intent and attitude etc.

Table 2
Common Required Writing Skills of Social Sciences Learners

Subject Matter	Content, insight, adequate depth, appropriateness to assignment making, and focusing on theme, well organized, argumentative and information synthesis, extent of focus, theme oriented write up

Mechanics	Writing style, hyphenation, usage, punctuating marks, abbreviations, composition, graphics, spelling, legible writing, use of articles, capitalization, pluralization and division of texts into chunks
Language organization	syntax, correct syntactical order, language command, specific discourse, range of vocabulary, expressions, set phrases, accurate use of expressions and organization, coherence and acceptable core of words
Micro- skills	Road map, analytical approach, reverse thinking, brain storming, rapid ideation, creative writing, use of rhetorical forms and suitable conventions, and connectors
Recommendations	Creative writing, plain language, transformation, guidance, write on different topics, scaffolding instructions, shun copy paste material

Regarding common required writing skills of social sciences learners, the teachers' perceptions have been classified into the following themes: subject matter (content), mechanics, language organization, micro-skills and recommendations. Subject matter entails to content, insight, adequate depth, appropriateness to assignment making, and focusing on theme, well organized, argumentative and information synthesis, extent of focus and theme oriented write up. On the other hand, mechanics of the language refers to writing style, hyphenation, usage, punctuating marks, abbreviations, composition, graphics, spelling and legible writing, use of articles, capitalization, pluralization and division of texts into chunks. Likewise, language organization involves syntax, correct syntactical order, language command, specific discourse, range of vocabulary, expressions, set phrases, accurate use of expressions and organization, coherence and acceptable core of words. Additionally, micro-skills integrate road map, analytical approach, reverse thinking, brain storming, rapid ideation, creative writing, use of rhetorical forms and suitable conventions, and connectors. As well, following recommendations are suggested to incorporate: creative writing, plain language, transformation and guidance, write on different topics, scaffolding instructions and shun copy paste material.

Table 3
Common Required Speaking Skills of Social Sciences Learners

Syntactical Crafting	Suitable expression usage, grammatical order, choice of words, grammatical order & structure, appropriate situation, particular discourse
Syntax fluency	articulation, vocal, speed, fluency, clarity, intonation, intelligibility of expression, accent, tone
Personal Tone-Voice	accurateness, self-confidence, intellect, proper communication, organization ability, articulacy, class contribution, thoughts & acquaintance

Oral Practice	narration, rationalization, query, intellectual capacity, supportive argumentation, depiction, question answer session
Recommendations	Imitative practice, dialogue, communicative activities, class discussions, situational drill, substitution practice, bilingual technique, audio lingual approach, peer work & cluster work, staging, information gap exercises

Teachers' responses about common required speaking skills of social sciences learners have been sorted out in the following themes: syntactical crafting, syntax fluency, personal tone, oral practice and recommendations. In this regard, syntactical crafting consolidates suitable expression usage, grammatical order, choice of words, grammatical order & structure, appropriate situation and particular discourse. On the other hand, syntax fluency includes articulation, vocal, speed, fluency, clarity, intonation, intelligibility of expression, accent and tone etc. Moreover, personal tone takes in accurateness, self-confidence, intellect, proper communication, organization ability, articulacy, class contribution, thoughts & acquaintance. Other than, oral practice pertains to narration, rationalization, query, intellectual capacity, supportive argumentation, depiction, question answer session. Other than, recommendations include imitative practice, dialogue, communicative activities, class discussions, situational drill, substitution practice, bilingual technique, audio lingual approach, peer work & cluster work, staging and information gap exercises.

Table 4
Common Required Listening Skills of Social Sciences Learners

Listen to understand	Input, clarity in ideas and thoughts, ample range of vocabulary, inferring of meanings, depiction of words, identification of fair fluent expressions
Active Listening Skills	Argumentation with teachers, hoist of full stretch, to deal with entire phrase
Effective methods to improve listening skills	Tape -recordings, BBC reports and news, talk shows, drills, news bulletin, keen listening, watching English dramas, films & documentaries, penetrating mind, active participants, mental alertness
Ways to enhance listening skills	Recognition of words, concentration, knowledge & culture, making inferences , recognizing lateral meanings, determining viewpoint
Recommendations	Opportunity to cope with entire structure and concept, inducing multiple activities, artificial engagements in small conversations, attentiveness , repeating and rephrasing, reflection, response, notes making while listening and summarizing

In light of teachers' responses, the information regarding common required listening skills of social sciences learners is categorized into following themes:

listen to understand, active listening skills, effective methods to improve listening skills, ways to enhance listening skills and recommendations. Listen to understand encapsulates input, clarity in ideas and thoughts, ample range of vocabulary, inferring of meanings, depiction of words and identification of fair fluent expressions. In addition, active listening skills include Argumentation with teachers, hoist of full stretch, to deal with entire phrase. Moreover, effective methods to improve listening skills integrate tape -recordings, BBC reports and news, talk shows, drills, news bulletin, keen listening, watching English dramas, films & documentaries, penetrating mind, active participants and mental alertness. As well, ways to enhance listening skills subsume recognition of words, concentration, knowledge & culture, making inferences, recognizing lateral meanings and determining viewpoint. Apart from, incorporated recommendations embody Opportunity to cope with entire structure and concept, inducing multiple activities, artificial engagements in small conversations, attentiveness, repeating and rephrasing, reflection, response, notes making while listening and summarizing.

Section II

Section-II deals with the perceptions of the fifteen teachers of Social Sciences departments of The Bahauddin Zakariya University Multan with reference to the existing proficiency of their learners with respect to their skills: reading, writing, speaking and listening skills. In this regard, findings have been presented below in table 5:

Table 5
Existing Proficiency Level of Social Sciences Learners

	Department of Economics	Department of Education	Department of Mass Communication
Reading Skills	Average	unsatisfactory	unsatisfactory
Writing Skills	Not so bad, somehow good	Less than average	inadequate
Speaking Skills	Almost satisfactory	Not Satisfactory	unsatisfactory
Listening Skills	Adequate	Only few can understand	To some extent

The teachers from the two departments were of the opinion that their students had low proficiency in their reading skills, while the respondents from the Economics Department opined that their learners had average skills to comprehend the texts.

With reference to writing skills, the teachers of the departments of Education and Mass Communication were of the opinion that their students had inadequate proficiency to cope up the academic situations. On the other hand, the students of Economics were somehow good but they were not so proficient to cope up required academic situations.

In respect of speaking skills, the teachers of Mass Communication and Education Departments were of the view; their students had been keeping the unsatisfactory proficiency, whereas the students of the Economics Department had adequate proficiency level to cater the academic needs.

As to listening skills, the teachers had a view that the students of Mass Com Department had average proficiency, while only few students of Education Department had ability to grasp the lectures and other communicative situations in English language. Likewise, the students of Economics Department had adequate proficiency to cope up the academic situations.

On the basis of teachers' perceptions, low proficiency in context of reading, writing, speaking and listening skills of the Social Sciences students is observed. To aid the breach between the existing and necessitated proficiency level of academic settings, policy makers must take the indispensable actions to deal with academic situations.

Findings

The findings regarding the existing situation of social sciences learners' English language skills report that they have inadequate linguistic proficiency. They have insufficient proficiency on English language skills to cope up the target or academic situations. And the required needs are highlighted in the analysis section as mentioned, which provoke the syllabus designers to design a course by keeping in view the gaps among the students' linguistics proficiency.

Rationale for course design

This section provides findings of needs analysis, rationale of the course, approaches to design a course and plan of course content.

Summary of the Findings of Needs Analysis

In light of findings of needs analysis, a new course outline has been designed. In this regard, following cores have been identified.

i.   English has a significant role in academia.
ii.   The students have inadequate language proficiency to execute the academic tasks.
iii.   A particular course is needed to bridge the gap, or current offered course is required to be adapted in view of this empirical study.

Course Learning Objectives

The course intends to develop the learners' skills: reading, writing, speaking and listening. The basic purpose is to make the students aware of the English language in academic discourse. The proposed course will:

i.   Perk up the students' the learners' capability to develop their linguistic proficiency.
ii.   Raise the cognizance among the students to deal with target academic situations
iii. Alter the stance of the students with regard to the English language.

In order to achieve the desired outcomes, objectives are crafted as to check the accountability of the course while teaching. The aims and designed objectives of the course must match with each other (Romo, 2006, p.127). The objectives are specified in the domain of following skills:

Reading Skills: the learners will

- be acquainted with wide range of vocabulary relevant to their particular discourse
- reinforce other skills like syntax, writing and pronunciation etc
- enhance their comprehension and critical thinking skills

Writing Skills: the learners will

- be familiar with expression of thought and to fabricate the link among ideas and content areas.
- demonstrate the capacity to write in diverse forms to achieve the academic goals.
- produce accurate syntactical order, organize the content and control the mechanics of the language in write up.

Speaking Skills: the learners will

- demonstrate the capacity to argue, discuss and respond to the content in different situations.
- synthesize information for oral presentation with effective use of vocabulary and accurate pronunciation and accent.
- evaluate their learning and set the targets for their performance.
- Listening Skills: the learners will
- be familiar with making inferences and predictions
- be able to have critical thinking skills, to distinguish between the formal and informal information, as well relevant and irrelevant information.
- identify and comprehend the relationship among the ideas

Eclectic Approach to Design a Course

To select the suitable approach to develop a course for social sciences learners by keeping in view the insights from the literature review of this study, empirical findings and personal observation of the academic situations, I settled on the eclectic approach. Eclectic approach is a mixture of different elements from different syllabi according to needs and situations. The research site is unique in nature, so this approach is chosen to achieve the goals.

Description of Course Contents

Clark (1985), Nunan (1988), Wehlburg (2006), Svinicki & McKeachie (2011) and Sabah (2018) offered intuitive thoughts to craft a course by choosing and sorting the content in light of intention of the undertaken study, needs analysis, basic skills, incorporated skills, accomplishing degree level by provoking students.

Suggestions

In light of above findings I suggest to set a stage to demonstrate the level of proficiency of the students by introducing a course of academic English. Hanging on the current scenario, this course entails to students' writing, mechanics of writing, reading, listening and speaking skills. For this, the instructors will be autonomous to select the teaching material and to teach the units individually or incorporating with each other to cover the content by using communicative language teaching method.

The course covers the range of topics in context of EAP:

Unit 1: Reading

Summarizing, inferring, problem solving, critical thinking, self questioning, connecting with background information, vocabulary, Skimming, drawing conclusion, distinguishing between facts and opinion, distinguish between main idea and supporting details, comprehending the intricate structures, prediction of meanings and drawing road maps, comprehension(lexical, literal, interpretive, applied and affective) and reading strategies

Unit 2: Mechanics of Writing

Grammatical focus, subject-verb agreement, moods, modal verbs, narration, voices, clauses, cohesive devices/connectors, organization, punctuation, prepositions, transitional expressions, personal pronouns and articles

Unit 3: Writing

Use of vocabulary, organizing information effectively, synthesis of information, notes making, problem solving, analytical approach, particular discourse, paragraph and essay writing

Unit 4: Speaking

Pronunciation, fluency, accuracy, selection of expressions: word order, presentations, clearness of ideas, discussion, using new vocabulary through listening, argumentation

Unit 5: Listening

Listening for general idea, recognizing particular information, terminology, comprehending structures and rhythmical expressions; comprehending tone, rhythm, intonation; focusing on relevant information, recognizing the utterances, notes taking and deducing the meanings of recognizable expressions.

This study aimed to probe out the linguistic requirements of social sciences learners. Findings of this study pave a way for more researches in different dimensions of this field. It can be carried out in designing further courses in area of EAP as well in other disciplines. Furthermore, it can be helpful in teaching training courses. As well, evaluating learners' motivational level in the environment of EAP is another striking feature for new research.

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