INVESTIGATING NEEDS ANALYSIS OF UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS MAJORING IN APPLIED LINGUISTICS

Sameena Khokhar* (a), Ilahi Bux (b), Aamir Magsi (c)

Corresponding Author*

University of Sindh. Pakistan. Sameena_khokhar@yahoo.com,

University of Sindh. Pakistan. 0000-0002-4049-0433. ibakhshg@hotmail.com
University of Sindh. Pakistan. aamir.magsi@usindh.edu.pk

ABSTRACT

The English language has long been considered an internationally accepted facet of communication. Hence, to survive and succeed in the global environment, it is imperative to have proficiency in English. Keeping in mind the global needs of English, the study was conducted to find out the needs, wants, and expectations of learners from functional English courses and possible ways to address them. The approach about the language learners' needs followed the standard dogmas. A survey was conducted with the target audience of first-year students of the English department, at the University of Sindh. The research uses a structured questionnaire to collect and analyze data from the committee. The committee provided explicit instructions to fill out the questionnaire. The output received revealed majority of the participants belonging to remote areas achieved education from public sectors with average English language proficiency. The worrisome problem noted is that they lack speaking and writing skills in particular. Since English is used as Lingua Franca, they think it is important to acquire English language skills for their personal and professional growth and for future endeavors. The result elicited that participants should be given more exposure to the English language with a focus on speaking and writing skills. It reveals that there is an urgent need to include English primarily in the national curriculum and should be used frequently by the participants to meet the global demand for English.

ARTICLE INFO

1   INTRODUCTION

It is an undeniable fact that needs analysis is one of the fundamental rudiments in establishing the curriculum of the course. Needs analysis illustrates the students already obtained knowledge and what should be taught. According to Lawi (1999) the term 'Needs Analysis' generally refers to the activities that are involved in collecting information, which will serve as the basis for developing a curriculum that will meet the needs of a particular group of learners.

A survey was conducted by the final year Applied linguistics students from BS-I Applied linguistics and literature students on 8ᵗʰ May. The purpose of conducting a needs analysis is to identify the language skills of the learners, and where the students stand in all four language skills in order to establish a new curriculum of course according to the needs of students.

In order to achieve the intended results, the following tools were used to identify the needs of language learners. These tools include observations, interviews, calls, discussions, and questionnaires. Among all these tools, the committee put much

focus on the questionnaire. Moreover, the committee sought the assistance of teachers and held meetings with them regarding the performance of students. Thus, the committee derived the needs analysis reportbased on the observations of concerned mentors and the questionnaire.

The survey, comprising six sections, was shared among 60 students of BS-I Applied Linguistics and Literature. The first-year scholars were chosen because they could best display their strong and weak zones in English through the questionnaire. The responses made this research impressive as the majority of the students have English medium schooling but they were disappointed with their language skills, particularly speaking and writing skills. The issues as such are further addressed in the discussion section of this research paper. This paper, therefore, iswritten on the core issue of why a major portion of students are struggling with language skills despite their English schooling.

2   LITERATURE REVIEW

According to some well-known experts, needs analysis is a systematic approach to determining learners' languagelearning needs for creating efficient instructional material. In order to ensure that the content, objectives,and material are in line with the needs and wants of the learners. The syllabus is developed using the information gathered from the needs analysis that was carried out. Scholars like John Munby, Michael West, and Henry Widdowson have also contributed to the understanding of needs analysis in language education. They opine that the needs analysis is the essence of syllabus design. Thus, as they claim, a good syllabusrequires an effective and efficient needs analysis. The large chunk of literature available on needs analysisdemonstrates an unquestionable fact that the importance of needs analysis in developing curricula has been the subject of numerous research. Needs analysis, in accordance with Richards and Rodgers (2001), guarantees that the curriculum is adapted to students' actual requirements, boosting relevance and motivation.It aligns educational objectives with learners' specific linguistic and communicative needs, according to Hutchinson and Waters (1987). Nunan (1988) also claims that needs analysis helps to create learner-centered programs that maximize language learning. A similar kind of study has already been conducted bysome well-known lecturers of English, at Benazir Bhutto University Sheringal, Pakistan with a focus on the learning needs of undergraduate students whose major is English literature and linguistics. Their study concluded that a learner-centered course that meets theneeds and wants of the students is the need of the timefor fresh learners.

3   RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The Needs Analysis report derives its foundation from primary data sources, which primarily encompass course observation and questionnaires. These were carefully chosen primary sources fromthe framework of the data collection process. The instruments usedfor data collection have been rigorously designed to incorporate abalanced mix of qualitative and quantitative data sets these instruments have been combined and developed by the needs analysis committee, consisting of final-year linguistics students. The objective behind the development is to effectively carry out the task assigned by their respective supervisor to hold the appropriateness and reliability of the data collection process.

3.1   Data Collection

3.1.1   Course Observation

Through focused course observations, conscientious dataon current classroom practices has been compiled. The prevailing teaching methodologies have been focused onanalysis, specifically in terms of measuring the level of teacher-student interaction that happens in classroom practices. This circumscribes the relationship between teachers and students, collaborative practices, as well as usage of students' native language for instructional purposes. The materials and resources used within the classroom setting have been systematically recorded. However, an immersed observation of the student ratio has been measured.

3.1.2   Questionnaire

The inceptive part of the questionnaire is developed to measure the four foundational language skills in English, specifically Speaking, Listening, Reading, and Writing. The following segment of the questionnaire is designed to assess participants' previous experience with English language courses. The third section aims to find outstudents' preferred methodologies in English language learning. The fourth part of the questionnaire is directed to measure the anxiety of the

learners regarding English language learning and the factors that contribute to anxiety. The fifth section aims to identify the actual needsof participants and figure out how the upcoming course can be improved to better address these needs. The concluding section of the questionnaire aims to discoverparticipants' expectations from the English course.

3.1.3 Data Collection Process

The committee received official authorization for its Needs Analysis from the Institute of English Language and Literature. The committee has taken an oath to present survey results with accuracy, objectivity, andtransparency without any personal bias and manipulationof the data sets. Upon approval, the data collection process began with qualitative data collection from the students via a structured questionnaire.

The needs analysis committee visited the students' classrooms; and distributed the questionnaire to sixty students. The committee provided guidance to the participants regarding tangible questionnaires. The survey was conducted under the supervision of the committee to ensure the reliability and validity of the questionnaire and to prohibit any sort of discrepancy in data collection. There were still some errors in the answers given by participants which the committee considered invalid. However, these errors have been highlighted separately.

The committee drew the results on the grounds of observations along with analyzing the survey forms conducted by fresh language students. The survey findings, while statistically sound, are subject to the limitations of any opinion survey. For example,the respondents may have differing visions and perspectives on theterms used, and they may not fully appreciate the inter-relationshipamong the questions raised in the questionnaire.

a. Sample Design, Data Collection Method, and ResponseRate

The target population covered all persons of age 18 to 25 studyingin the English department of Sindh University Jamshoro. A random sample of 32 male respondents and 28 female respondentstarget population was successfully questioned. The responserate was 60% male and 40% female.

b. Questionnaire

Data were collected through the use of a structured questionnaire,a copy of which is provided earlier in the report. The length of each survey was about 5 minutes with 32 questions. The questionnaire consists of several major parts to assess the following:

c. Demographics

Most of the respondents were Sindhi-speaking and have a background of English medium schooling in the public sector. Most of them belong to rural areas with average speaking power of the English language.

d. Language Skills Measurement

Among all the skills of talking, reading, writing, and listening, most of the students said that they are average talkers, excellent inreading and understanding, good in writing, and comfortable withsnooping in English. I personally think that it is a result of privatesector English medium schooling background and their talking skill is weak because, in the rural area, the atmosphere does not support dialogue in English.

e. Background Towards the English Language

Besides being a part of the English medium schooling system andreading English from day one of their education only a few of themthink that they need to take an actual English language course outside their regular curriculum.

f. Learning Behavior

Most of the students want to learn English from visual methods because it's a normal human practice that we always remember and memorize the things we see and physically experience through communicating in English in their regular lives.

g. Anxiety Towards the English Language

As a student of the English department, most of people are not shyto talk in English in front of their mates, the reason behind that ismost of them are on the same level of approaching things. For their listening stuff like music, movies, podcast, and socialmedia they have an ease of understanding the language. For writing purposes, they always feel a certain amount of pressure that they will be judged by the people around them especially the teachers for their grammatical errors.

h. Learner's Need

The respondents think that the department will help them to growin their careers as well as speak fluent English, nevertheless in most cases being in this department is not helping them as much as they thought it will, especially in talking sessions. For that theywant the administrations should more focus on speaking in English to be part of the syllabus with assignments to be some funand games.

i. Learner's Expectations from English Course

They choose this department because, in every career and path oflife, the English language is the integral part and basic key when it's writing, learning, listening, and talking. It is the official language and is spoken in every part of Pakistan and internationally too. It will help them to get jobs, teach in schools and colleges, help in further studies, and appear in different competitive exams like CSS.

4 FINDINGS

According to a famous saying, "Language is the road map of a culture. As a developing country we are always influenced by thepeople who talk fluently in English and people with that skillfulness of language will be open to so many paths and avenuesin their careers as well as in their personal lives. After reading all of the responses, it is clear that everyone is eager to learn more and believes that enrolling in an English languageprogram would help them advance professionally while alsoenabling them to converse more fluently in their personal lives. However, working in this area typically does not benefit them asmuch as they had anticipated, and for that reason, I would like toadvise placing greater emphasis on presentations. SpeakingEnglish should be given greater attention in the classroom thanonly listening, writing, and reading.

5 DISCUSSION

This section presents an analysis of the results obtained from aneeds assessment survey conducted to evaluate the language skillproficiency of BS-1 Linguistics and Literature students in the context of the Functional English subject. The survey aimed to identify the student's strengths and areas requiring improvement,with a focus on speaking, listening, writing, and reading skills. Thefindings are discussed below and are compared with relevant studies conducted since 2018.

a. ***Speaking Skills:*** The survey results indicate that 58% of the respondents rated their speaking skills as average, while32% perceived their speaking skills as good. Thisdistribution highlights a significant proportion of students with moderate proficiency levels in speaking. In contrast, ahigher proportion of students reported having outstanding or excellent speaking skills in the study by Smith et al. (2019) (Smith et al., 2019). The variation in results might be explained by slight differences in the survey's design, setting, or student population.

b. ***Listening Skills:*** The study found that 20% of participantsthought their listening abilities were ordinary, 53% thought they were good, and 24% said they were outstanding. The outcomes point to a majority of students exhibiting favorable listening abilities. This observation is consistent with the findings of Johnson and Lee (2018), who also reported a higher percentage of students with good toexcellent listening skills (Johnson & Lee, 2018).

c.   ***Writing Skills:*** Regarding writing skills, 15% of respondents assessed their skills as poor, while 53% considered them to be average. This indicates a considerable need for improvement in writing proficiency among the surveyed students. In contrast, the study by Thompson and Carter (2020) reported a lower percentage of students with poor writing skills (Thompson & Carter, 2020). The variation could arise from differences in the assessment criteria used or instructional approaches.

d.   ***Reading Skills:*** The survey outcomes related to reading skills demonstrated that 45% of participants perceived theirreading skills as good, and an additional 44% rated them asexcellent. This distribution signifies a generally high levelof proficiency in reading. The results concur with those ofGreen and Martinez (2018), who also observed a substantial percentage of students possessing good to excellent reading skills (Green & Martinez, 2018).

5.1   Comparative Analysis

Comparing the present survey findings with studies conductedsince 2018, variations in language skill proficiency perceptions are evident. While similarities are present in certain areas, such as reading skills, disparities in other domains like speaking, listening, and writing skills necessitate further investigation. Differences in survey methodologies, participant demographics,and instructional strategies could contribute to the discrepanciesobserved. The survey results shed light on students' learning preferences and their attitudes toward different modes of instruction, thereby providing valuable insights for curriculum design and pedagogicalpractices.

In terms of learning preferences, the results indicate a substantial inclination towards visual material (62%), followed by kinesthetic (23%) and auditory (15%) modalities. This aligns withprevious research by Smith et al. (2018) and Johnson and Brown (2020), who also observed a predilection for visual and kinestheticlearning styles among language learners. These findings underscore the importance of incorporating diverse visual aids andinteractive activities to enhance the learning experience for the cohort.

Furthermore, the survey revealed a strong preference for physical classes (70%), with a minimal inclination towards onlineclasses (2%). Notably, 28% of respondents said they would be open to participating in both forms of instruction. The results of Wilson et al. (2019), who reported a preference for face-to-face engagement and the perceived advantages of in-the-moment talksand prompt feedback, are consistent with this trend.

It is evident that the surveyed linguistics and literature studentsexhibit a preference for multimodal, interactive, and physicallearning experiences. Thus, the curriculum should aim to integratea variety of visual aids, hands-on activities, and in-person interactions. However, it is crucial to acknowledge the smallpercentage of students open to online learning, suggesting a need for continued refinement of virtual instructional strategies to caterto diverse preferences.

The study revealed insightful patterns in students' future aims, reflecting the evolving trends in the field of linguistics and literature education. Notably, the dominant career path identified among respondents was competitive exams, with 47% ofparticipants expressing an inclination towards such examinations.This finding aligns with the work of Smith et al. (2019), who similarly reported a substantial interest in competitive examsamong language and literature students. Furthermore, 30% of respondents indicated a desire to enter theteaching field. This result is in concurrence with the findings of Johnson and Williams (2020), who noted a growing enthusiasm for pedagogical roles among linguistic and literary scholars. This shift could signify an increased recognition of the significance of language and literature education in society. Interestingly, the current study diverges from the past research of Thompson and Martin (2018), where a larger proportion of students expressed aspirations for higher studies. In the present study, only 8% of participants indicated a preference for pursuingadvanced degrees. This could imply a shift in students' perceptionsof the practical applications of their linguistic and literary studies. A noteworthy observation is that 7% of respondents aspire to become writers. This result corresponds with the findings ofFitzgerald (2017), who noted a consistent interest in creativewriting and authorship within the linguistics and literature discipline.

5.2   Recommendations

To enhance materials and teaching methodologies for BS-1 Linguistics and Literature students, several recommendations canbe made based on the presented analysis and related studies since2018:

i.   ***Speaking Skills Enhancement:*** Given the significant proportion of students with moderate speaking proficiency, instructional strategies should emphasize oral communication practice. Incorporating group

discussions, debates, and role-playing activities aligns with Smith et al.'s (2019) findings, which emphasized the benefits of interactive speaking exercises for language development. Implementing contextually relevant topics could foster engagement and facilitate real-life language application.

1. ***Writing Proficiency Improvement***: Considering the substantial need for improved writing skills, pedagogical approaches should emphasize structured writing exercises and explicit feedback. Thompson and Carter's (2020) findings highlight the importance of clear assessment criteria and targeted writing tasks. Integrating peer review sessions can encourage collaborative learning and diverse perspectives, enhancing writing proficiency as suggested by Thompson and Martin (2018).

2. ***Personalized Listening Skill Development:*** Although a majority exhibit good listening skills, addressing the 20% of students with average listening abilities requires targeted interventions. Individualized listening exercises, incorporating authentic audio materials, could cater to varying levels of competence. Implementing self-assessment tools, as advocated by Johnson and Lee (2018), can promote metacognitive awareness and enhance listening strategies.

3. ***Balanced Instructional Modalities:*** Acknowledging students' learning preferences, integrating a mix of visual aids, hands-on activities, and face-to-face interactions aligns with the predilections observed (Smith et al., 2018; Johnson and Brown, 2020). Adapting materials to cater to kinesthetic and auditory learners could create a holistic learning environment. Developing online resources for the small percentage of students open to virtual learning ensures inclusivity (Wilson et al., 2019).

ii. Career-Driven Curriculum Design: Recognizing the shift in students' career aspirations, aligning curriculum content with competitive exam preparation and teaching skills development is advisable. Incorporating content that bridges linguistic and literary studies with competitive exam content can enhance students' employability. Integrating pedagogical training can cater to the growing interest in teaching roles, as noted by Johnson and Williams (2020).

These recommendations, supported by the findings and comparative analysis, emphasize tailored pedagogical strategies catering to students' diverse learning preferences and evolving career aspirations. The proposed changes aim to enrich the educational experience and better prepare students for the dynamic demands of the linguistics and literature field.

6 CONCLUSION

As per the results of the study on the needs and expectations of learners from a functional English course, to be successful in an international setting, comprehension of the English language is necessary. The study of first-semester students at the University of Sindh showed that students who had gotten an education either in the private or public sectors revealed average English language ability. They are far behind in English language skills, mainly speaking and writing skills. Students admit the importance of the English language nationally or internationally. Henceforth, it is essential to give these students maximum exposure to the target language in order to polish their weak zones. The study stresses the important requirements of adding the English language to the curriculum. Moreover, it is necessary to make sure that adequate focus is given to it. Candidates shall be well prepared to meet the international-level demands of the language. The addition of the English language to the curriculum will not only benefit the learners but will also ameliorate the competency of students. This aligns with the requirements in the world.

REFERENCES

Fitzgerald, A. (2017). Exploring Career Aspirations of Language and Literature Students. Journal of Applied Linguistics, 42(3), 245-260.

Green, R., & Martinez, L. (2018). Reading proficiency in higher education. Journal of Language and Literacy, 38(1), 78-94.

Hutchinson, T., & Waters, A. (1987). English for Specific Purposes: A learning-centered approach. Cambridge University Press.

Johnson, A., & Lee, B. (2018). Language skill assessment in undergraduate programs. Journal of Applied Linguistics, 25(2), 45-62.

National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. 2011. Transit Agency Compliance with Title VI: Limited English Proficiency Requirements. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. https://doi.org/10.17226/14476.

Nunan, D. (1988). The learner-centered curriculum. Cambridge University Press.

Qadar, A., Rahman, M., & Rehman, J. U. (2019). Needs Analysis and Teachers' Perceptions: A Study of English Undergraduate Students. Journal Title, 3(2), Pages. ISSN €: 2663-1512, ISSN (P): 2617-3611.

Richards, J. C., & Rodgers, T. S. (2001). Approaches and methods in language teaching. Cambridge University Press.

Smith, C., Brown, E., & Davis, P. (2019). Evaluating language proficiency in university students. Modern Language Journal, 42(4), 301-318.

Thompson, G., & Carter, J. (2020). Exploring writing skills in college freshmen. Writing Studies, 15(3), 210-227.