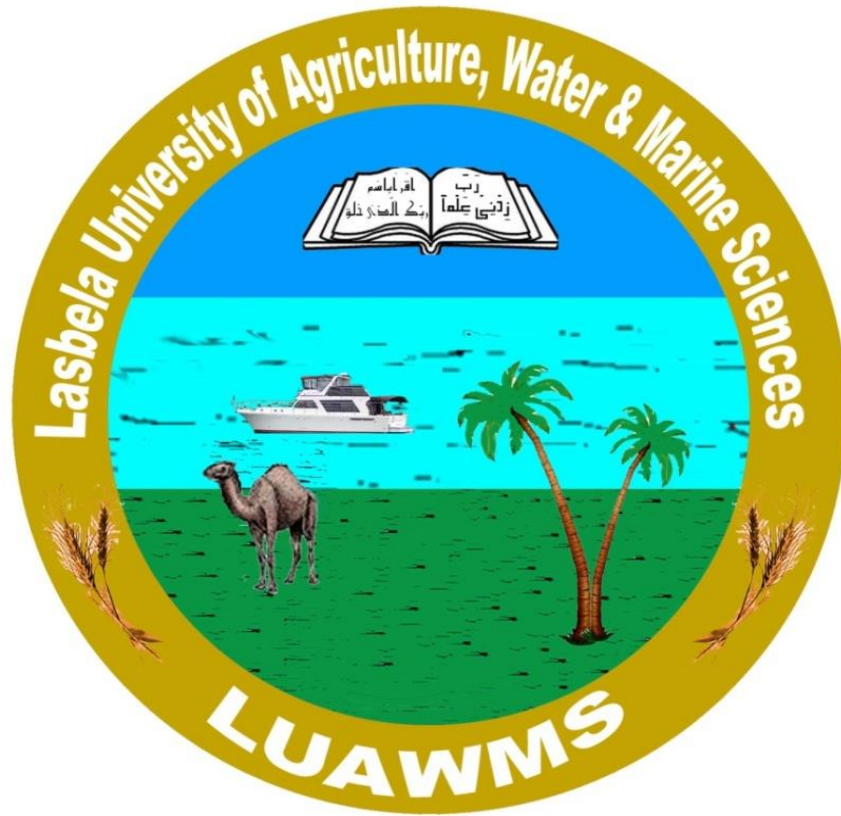


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I. All manuscripts in English should follow the following format:

The first page should contain title; author(s)'s name(s), affiliation, E-mail address; and abstract of 150-350 words, followed by three to five key words, main text, acknowledgment, endnotes, and references in subsequent pages. Key words should be given in italics.

II. Manuscripts in English should use the following style for headings and subheadings:

- 1.
- 1.1
- 1.1.1
- 1.1.2
- 1.2
- 2

The main heading should be written bold in font size 14. All other headings should be written bold in font size 12. DONOT underline any headings at all.

III. Tables, figures, and maps should have headings and be numbered consecutively and should be clearly presented. Notes and sources should be placed under each table and figure. Photo will be treated as figures.

Format

Use Letter size paper with Times New Roman writing style font size 12 for the main text with line spacing 1.5 and 10 for the abstract with 1.15 line spacing. Left margin should be 3.5 but all other margins should be 2.5 mm. Tables and figures should not be split on two pages.

Other requirements

Give one paragraph introduction of all authors in five to seven sentences (for each author) describing their educational background and research achievements in a separate file. But do not use hyperlinks.

Plagiarism

Authors should submit similarity index along with the manuscripts of the papers. They are also required to submit an affidavit declaring that the material in the paper is their own and it has not already been published. Quotes should be properly acknowledged.

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- 1) Use APA style of referencing.

Note on Authors

Dr. Shumaila Shafket Ali is an Assistant Professor at the Department of English, University of Karachi. She holds a Ph.D. degree in English (Linguistics), M. Phil in English (Linguistics), M.A in English (Linguistics), and M. A. in English Literature. She has conducted several workshops on Professional Development and English Language Teaching and has more than 20 research publications in HEC recognized journals to her credit. She has also presented her papers in both national and international conferences. Her fields of interest include Sociolinguistics, Discourse Analysis, ELT, and Language Assessment.

Dr. Munir Khan is working as Assistant Professor in Faculty of Languages and Literature, Lasbela University of Agriculture, Water and Marine Sciences, Pakistan. He has completed both Master and PhD from University Putra Malaysia. His research publications are in both national and international journals. He has also presented research papers in International Conferences. He is a reviewer of 03 National and International Journals.

Ms. Asra Khan has been working as a lecturer at Bahauddin Zakariya University for the past six years. She is also a PhD student with her major in English Language Teaching in academically diverse university classrooms. She has an Mphil with a particular interest in South Asian Literature which shows her variety of interests in the field. She has been a part of various national and international conferences. She began her career as an English teacher to Olevel students in Beaconhouse School system, Multan.

Ms. Shafaq Khalid, parallel to her Academic career, is currently working with British Council as Venue Staff. She is an M.Phil student with her dissertation related to literary discourse study of South Asian Literature. She has been a part of research projects and Workshops. She has worked as an Educator in Government Emerson College Multan and Government Postgraduate College for Women Shujabad as CTI (College Teaching Internee).

Ms. Amber Nasreen Anjum is working as Manager Research Operations in Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto Institute of Science and Technology, Karachi. She has published 02 research papers in national journals.

Ms. Farheen Shaikh is an English Language Teacher in Sindh Education and Literacy Department. She completed her M.A English in Literature and secured her M.Phil (Applied Linguistics) from the University of Sindh. She is currently pursuing her PhD (Applied Linguistic) at the University of Sindh. Her research areas of interest include EAP (English for Academic Purposes); ESP (English for Specific Purposes); issues in testing and evaluation; English language teaching through

technology; Critical Discourse Analysis; culture, language and identity; and English language teaching through bilingual approach.

Ms. Farah Naz Abbasi is Lecturer of English at Shaheed Benazir Bhutto University, Shaheed Benazirabad. She completed her B.S English from the Shah Abdul Latif University Khairpur Sindh and her M.Phil (Applied Linguistics) from the University of Sindh, Jamshoro. She is currently enrolled in PhD (Applied Linguistics) at the University of Sindh, Jamshoro. Her research areas of interest include (Second language Acquisition) SLA, Sociolinguistics, (classroom-based research) investigating language in classrooms, (corpus linguistics) different kinds of written and spoken texts, (learner autonomy) how learners approach language learning, testing and assessment of language learning, and vocabulary (including multiword expressions), ELT (English Language Teaching).

Ms. Shehla Anwer is an English lecturer ((Literature and Linguistics)) at NUML University Karachi Campus. She completed her MA in English Literature from University of Balochistan, Quetta. She is holding degrees of B.Ed. and M.Ed. She got her degree of M.Phil in (Applied Linguistics) from Sardar Bahadur Khan Women's University Quetta. She is currently pursuing her PhD in (Applied Linguistics) at University of Sindh. Her research areas of interest are Factors Causing English Writing anxiety, English Language teaching in Pakistan, Language Culture and identity, Curriculum Implementation in Pakistan, ESL grammatical errors, Language teaching through Technology, Language teaching through Literature.

Mr. Amir Saeed Khan has completed his MS linguistics from, Azad & Jamu Kashmir University Muzafarabad, AJK. He is doing PhD from University of Sindh, Jamshoro. He has published many research papers in national journals.

Dr. Arshad Saleem is currently teaching in Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto Institute of Science and Technology, Karachi. He has published numerous research papers in National and International Journals.

Miss Sana Zahra has completed her M.Phil from the Department of Applied Linguistics Kinnaird College Lahore as a distinguished research scholar.

Dr. Urooj Fatima Alvi is working as an Assistant Professor of English Department of English at University of Education Lahore.

Qurrat-ul-Ain is Lecturer, in the Department of English, Virtual University of Pakistan

Maida Ashraf National University of Computer and Emerging Sciences Lahore, Pakistan.

Zahida Mansoor National University of Computer and Emerging Sciences Lahore, Pakistan.

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**Farheen Shaikh, Farah Naz Abbasi,
& Shehla Anwer Kurd**

Exploring the Role of EAP (English for Academic Purposes) Course in Developing the Learners' English Language Proficiency at Higher Education Level

Farheen Shaikh, Farah Naz Abbasi, & Shehla Anwer Kurd

ABSTRACT: The EAP (English for Academic Purposes) courses at the tertiary level are taught as the Functional English courses as these EAP courses consider not only practical use of language for students but also the use of language in the particular arena of specialization by the learners. The present study purports at investigating the role of the existing EAP course of the University of Sindh in developing the learners' English language proficiency and identifying the methods employed in the EAP course to assess and evaluate the learners' English language proficiency. The study also aims at finding the extent to which the learners are satisfied with their assessment and evaluation results and exploring the learners' suggestions for the improvement of the assessment and evaluation in the EAP course. Total 23 Part II undergraduates from five different departments were recruited as participants through random sampling method. The study employed qualitative research method and semi-structured interviews were conducted. The obtained data was analysed thematically. The findings of the study revealed that the EAP course played an important role in developing and increasing the students' English language proficiency as they improved their speaking skills and confidence because they got the opportunity to speak English in the class. The teacher, the EAP book, and self-study altogether facilitated them in improving their English proficiency at the university. Majority was highly satisfied with their assessment results. It was also found that for assessment, all the interviewed departments of the university have similar design of exam paper. The students suggested an exam paper design like that of CSS (Central Superior Service) Exam. Further, there should be a balance between test questions and time duration.

Keywords: *EAP, Higher Education Level, English Language Proficiency, Assessment and Evaluation.*

1. Introduction

The EAP (English for Academic Purposes) courses at tertiary level are selected as the English courses as these courses consider not only practical use of language for students but also the use of language in the particular arena of specialization by the learners (Chowdhury and Haider, 2012). Therefore, the learners and the context are focused in EAP while the language itself is given primary importance in EGP (English for General Purposes). As proficiency of English is crucial for the academic and professional achievements (Sultan, et al., 2019), EAP courses aim at enabling the learners of higher education to have enough proficiency in the selective aspects of English language so that learners can be successful in learning and getting the information and knowledge through textbooks, lectures and group study in a limited or shortest period of time.

In the context of English for Specific/Academic Purposes, supporting the views of Hutchinson and Waters (1987) and Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998) Celik (2018) explain that, it is crucial in the EAP courses to investigate if the EAP course is efficiently and effectively developing the learners' English language proficiency and facilitating the students' learning and achievements.

In addition, Hutchinson and Waters (1987) claim it is necessary for the ESP courses to justify their appropriateness. Moreover, inferentially investigation regarding the suitability of the course for the learners is an all-inclusive task for attaining a complete and clear idea that whether and by what means the function of the course is fulfilled (Celik, 2018; &Su, 2009). In Teaching English for Academic Purposes (TEAP) it is very important to collect a valuable feedback from the stakeholders of the EAP course as their feedback can assist in increasing the quality of teaching (Klimova, 2015).

EAP courses help the learners advance their English language proficiency, get confidence to exist and learn, and improve their accomplishments and scores in other subjects (University of Missouri-St. Louis, 2016). The proficiency of the learners are assessed after teaching the course in order to evaluate the effectiveness of the EAP course. Special attention needs to be paid on the assessment pattern for measuring learners' skills so that assessment can be conducted effectively.

An EAP course designed by Higher Education Commission is being taught to the multidisciplinary learners of Part I at the University of Sindh. Considering the above claims and assertions, the present study is conducted to investigate the role of the existing EAP course of the University of Sindh in developing the learners' English language proficiency; and to identify the methods employed in EAP course to assess and evaluate the learners' English language proficiency and the extent to which the learners are satisfied with their assessment and evaluation results. The study also aims at exploring the the learners' suggestions for the improvement of the assessment and evaluation in the EAP course.

Having designed the objectives, the following three research questions are formulated for the study.

1. What is the role of the existing EAP course of the University of Sindh in developing the learners' English language proficiency?
2. What methods are employed in the EAP course to assess and evaluate the learners' English language proficiency and to what extent are the learners satisfied with their assessment and evaluation results?
3. What do the learners suggest for the improvement of the assessment and evaluation in the EAP course?

The findings of the study will be beneficial for the EAP teachers, learners, policy makers, course designers and administration of the university and other public sector universities where EAP courses are implemented.

2. Literature Review

The increasing demand of English language learning calls to design a course of English language which can fulfill the learners' specific needs. During the last century it was realized that each learner has different needs, especially when learners are from different social contexts (Crystal, 2003; & Orr, 2001).

Paradiz (2012) emphasizes genuineness of EAP contents that the learning material should be relevant to the learners' needs. Learners' needs are given primary importance in EAP. For designing and evaluating the EAP syllabus it is essential to understand the learners' needs (Sultan et al., 2019).

The EAP courses at tertiary level are selected as the English courses because these courses consider not only practical use of language for students but also the use of language in the particular arena of specialization by the learners (Chowdhury and Haider, 2012). Therefore, the learners and the context are focused in EAP while the language itself is given primary importance in EGP (English for General Purposes).

Chowdhury and Haider (2012) differentiated EAP and EGP in this way that in EAP the students learn particular academic and formal genres of language whereas in general English courses the students learn social and informal genres.

Hyland and Lyon (2002) describe that the teachers of English Language have recognized that dissimilarity is found between the teachings to the students who are learning English for fulfilling their academic needs and to the learners who want to fulfill their general needs regarding language. Another difference is found in the teaching to those namely the learners of ESP (English for Specific Purpose) who aim to fulfill their occupational needs. Hyland and Lyon (2002) argue that the EAP courses designed for the learners of ESL and EFL have reached the worldwide commercial level. EAP courses aim at enabling the learners of higher education to have enough proficiency in the selective aspect of English language so that learners can be successful in learning and getting the information and knowledge through textbooks, lectures and group study in a limited or shortest period of time.

The EAP learners are the adults (Cercone, 2008; Miroballi, 2010; & Tahir, 2012). The age of most of the EAP learners is over 18 and they know what they need to learn; what is lacking in them and what they want to learn; they know well what they are and what they want to be (Gillett & Wray, 2006). According to Parker (2004), “adults can be good foreign language learners, and more so when their particular aptitudes and needs are taken into account” (p. 9). Knowles (1984) believes that “as a person matures he or she becomes ready to learn when they experience a need to know something” (p. 12).

Üstünel & Kaplan (2015) note that “evaluation of an EAP program is required to bring necessary improvement in it and make it effective and efficient” (p. 34). Klimova (2015) believes that in Teaching EAP, it is very important to evaluate EAP course as a valuable feedback can be provided to increase the quality of teaching. Nunan (1988) explains the significance of evaluation that evaluation tells about the need for some modifications in a course in order to achieve the course objectives more effectively, if the course objectives are not being achieved by some specific learners. Moreover, Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998) declare that evaluation provides the information regarding the weaknesses of the course and its suitability for the learners.

Another study was carried out by Salumahaleh, et al., (2013) at Bu Ali Sina regarding the role of the EAP course in developing the English language proficiency of learners. They found in their study that the EAP course was helpful in developing

the students' reading and writing proficiency but was not of great help for the speaking proficiency.

Hossain (2013) conducted a study to find the needs of the students of engineering at Presidency University Dhaka. The findings of the needs analysis showed that the learners often didn't succeed in producing well-organized paragraphs because they couldn't create cohesive, coherent, and analytical writing. As a result, for those students improvement of speaking and writing skills are extremely important. He concludes the result of his study that the students possessed almost twelve-year experience of learning the target language, i.e. English but they didn't have a good proficiency level in English. They could perform better in writing rather than in speaking. Hossain declares that Business Communication is needed to be learned by the learners to be successful in their professional career. Therefore, speaking skills and business correspondence need to be focused.

Ekici (2003) conducted a research for identifying the language aspects and sub-skills needed to be learned through EAP course by the learners of Faculty of Applied Sciences at Ba_kent University to develop their English language proficiency. The researcher discovered "the sub-skills which were attached the greatest importance: for speaking skill regarded as learning needs were asking questions, answering questions, describing, comparing-contrasting, solving problems, making presentations, producing correct pronunciation, using appropriate intonation and stress patterns and for listening skill regarded as learning needs, obtaining specific information, listening for translating; for listening skill regarded as target needs were understanding native speakers, understanding face-to-face conversations, conversations on the phone, listening to the radio, understanding TV programmes, announcements at different places, presentations and discussions; for reading skill regarded as target needs were reading business letters, brochures, itineraries, catalogues, fax messages, newspapers, magazines and periodicals, maps and email messages as text types; for writing skill regarded as target needs were writing business letters, notices, itineraries, tour commentaries, brochures and leaflets" (p. 100)

The study regarding the assessment and evaluation of the EAP learners was conducted by Üstünel & Kaplan (2015) in which the greater part of the

undergraduates declared their frustration with the writing section of the examination as the students found it difficult and impracticable to complete the writing section in the time allotted to them. The majority of the students in their study proposed that there should be given those words that are already taught and discussed in the class.

In the Pakistani context, Ayoub and Khan (2017) investigated English language needs of the engineering undergraduates in Multan. Their study revealed that writing and speaking skills are the most essential skills for the engineering students. Moreover, the instructional material was not suitable for the future engineers.

Sultan et al. (2019) analysed Pakistani Engineering students' target needs and also identified the gap between the students' needs and the present syllabi.

The section reviewed the related literature and presented the studies conducted in the context of the study. The above discussion certifies that undertaking an investigation for analyzing the learners' needs and evaluating the effectiveness of EAP courses is really necessary, as it brings improvement in the English teaching and learning programmes and satisfies the learners' needs by identifying and removing the gaps.

3. Methodology

In this study the qualitative method is employed. In this method respondents respond in detail to provide more information regarding the phenomenon (Cassell & Symon, 2011). Hence, the method makes the respondents provide the researchers comprehend thoroughly the issues.

Dörnyei (2007) noted that interviews provide interviewers flexibility and a great quantity of in-depth data regarding interviewees' experiences, perceptions, sentiments and aims. The mentioned advantages give good reason for its wide usage in the studies on persons' beliefs, desires, interests, and perceptions (Gu, 2009; Gao, 2008; Parks & Raymond, 2004; Gao, 2006; Wenden, 1991; Gan, Humphreys & Hamp-Lyons, 2004).

Table 1: Methodological Design of the Study

➤ Participants For Interviews	<i>Departments</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Total</i>
	General History	4	1	5
	Sociology	3	1	4
	Social Work	3	1	4
	Economics	4	2	6
	International Relations	3	1	4
	TOTAL	17	6	23
➤ Data Collection Tool and Analysis	Interview			
	Thematic Analysis			

In the study total 23 Part II undergraduates who were taught EAP course in Part I from five different departments were recruited as participants through random sampling method. The study employed qualitative research method and semi-structured interviews were conducted. The obtained data was analysed thematically. In the study the semi-structured interview questions were adapted from Chilli (2013) who revealed the EAP learners' perceptions regarding EAP course. The validity had already been checked by the developer. For making the interviews reliable all the interviews were taped and transcribed. The willing participants were recruited and informed about the objectives of the study. The right to withdraw from the study at any stage of the study was also given and their confidentiality and their anonymity were protected.

4. Results and Discussion

This section presents the results and discussion of the data. The two major themes emerged which were further divided into sub themes.

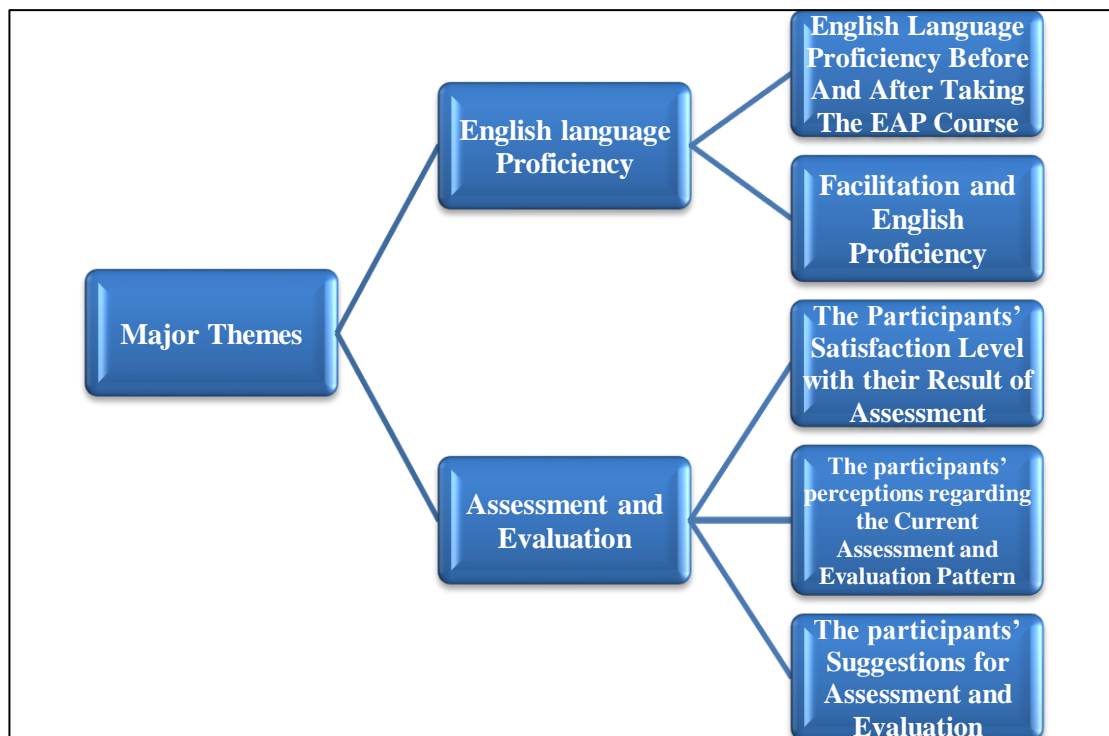


Figure 1: Major Themes

4.1 English Language Proficiency

This section deals with the first theme i.e. English Language Proficiency. It presents the findings and discussion of the two sub themes in which the major theme is subdivided.



Figure 2: Theme 1- English Language Proficiency

Through qualitative data, students were asked about their English language proficiency before and after taking the EAP course; and what factors facilitated them most in improving their proficiency.

4.1.1 English Language Proficiency Before and After Taking the EAP Course

The participants were asked about their level of English language proficiency before getting admission in the university and after taking EAP course in Part I of undergraduate program at University of Sindh.

According to the results, the level of English language proficiency before getting admission in the university for half of the participants was “Good”, for less than a quarter was “Average” and for the rest of them was poor. The findings seem to support Esmaeili (2016) who in his study found the students’ English proficiency low. According to the University of New England (2016), the EAP course is designed for tertiary level learners who want to improve their study skills and English language proficiency. 65% of the respondents believed that their level has increased to a great extent. Some of the respondents with a considerable improvement in their proficiency level compared college and university teaching ‘in colleges, English teachers teach us English in native languages.’ Also, they didn’t have English speaking environment in colleges while in university, teaching is in English. They told that the teachers provided them the environment in which they could learn English. One of the participants declared that, *“to learn anything the right environment needs to be created.”*

Some respondents were of the view that EAP course has increased their speaking skills and confidence because they got the opportunities to speak English in the class. This finding supports Bell (1998), who believes that opportunities are imperative and students build up and convey their thoughts freely and explicitly and in their opinions they create arguments. EAP courses help the learners advance their English language proficiency, get confidence to exist and learn, and improve their accomplishments and scores in other subjects (University of Missouri-St. Louis, 2016)

26% of the participants declared that their English proficiency level has increased a little. The reasons mentioned by the participants behind getting a little improvement in their English proficiency level are: their English proficiency level was poor; they

had studied in Sindhi and Urdu medium schools and colleges; they were far behind those class fellows who had English medium schooling so far. Also, they used to face difficulties in understanding things in English in the class. One participant says,

'We were considered to have same knowledge of English like those who were good in English. The entire class was taught the same thing in the same way. Many good students used to understand those things taught in English in the class because of having the knowledge that needed to be required for understanding those things. Therefore, we used to understand those things to some extent in the class.'

This is found in line with the findings of Esmaili (2016) who declared that the students could not comprehend and understand things in English as their English proficiency was low and the EAP courses couldn't considerably increase the English proficiency of the students.

9% participants of the present study mentioned that their level has not changed. The reasons behind getting no any improvement in their English proficiency level, they told that they had already taken advanced level of English course from English Language centres and whatever was taught to them in the class they already knew those things. One of them told that *"I had better English before coming to university because I used to read English novels."* This appears to support Christine (2016) who found that "the reason to not privilege proficiency over actual need is that those deemed to have a high or a high enough level of English proficiency may have limited, or perhaps no access to EAP support, if such courses target lower-level students. Proficient students are often considered 'too advanced' to need EAP support" (493).

The students were asked about the factors that facilitated them in improving their English proficiency which are discussed under the next heading.

4.1.2 Facilitation and English Proficiency

The participants were given four options -teacher, peers, the EAP book, and self-study and they were asked to tell the factors they found most facilitating in the

improvement of their English proficiency at the university. 71% of the participants of the present study believe that the teacher, the EAP book, and self-study altogether facilitated them in the improvement of their English proficiency at the university. 14% of the participants declared that they got facilitation from the teacher and the EAP book in the improvement of their English proficiency. 10% of them asserted that they found the teacher and self-study facilitating. 5% participants found self-study the most facilitating in improving their English proficiency.

The participants revealed that the teacher used to give us their entire class time, as according to one participant,

'but the time was not sufficient, students needed to go to the corners also for self-study and if I had not done self-study my English Proficiency level was terrible'.

The finding is inconsistent with the findings of Bright and Randow (2008) who found that students of first year did not entirely employ the offer, yet they needed to have language skills development. According to Evans and Morrison (2011), “the most of the Part I students to get adjustment in the new environment of university, to meet the demands of the university and to develop language skill rely on networking and get support from peer than from EAP course” (p. 199)

The participants asserted that their English teacher facilitated them, as it has been remarked by Cohen (1998) that the teachers are “facilitator of learning” (p. 97) and it supports Arthurs (2012) who argues that in the first year of the university students work with English language teachers who make efforts to enhance the students’ English proficiency level and to accustom them to utilize the language of their particular area of study, moreover they effort to support the students in adjusting in the world of an institution of higher education. As one of the participants of the present study noted:

'the teachers provide us good learning environment. If we have any difficulty in any topic, we ask from them. We also do self-study but from the teacher we get more help because the teachers are well experienced and they have

gone through the learning process while we are still in learning process.'

According to another participant,

'whatever madam used to teach us I would search on internet for more knowledge. I used to search on internet because of madam. As madam had showed us the way, if she had not taught us the things I wouldn't have searched those things on internet.'

This seems to be in line with Arthurs's (2012:41) claim that "the English teacher can prepare the students to take responsibility for their learning."

The participants asserted that they learn through self-study, as one of them noted that:

"we are in university we can't and should not depend on the teachers' lectures. We have to work hard and do self-study."

Abdulkader (2009) claims regarding the relevant findings that the students found self-study an important and helpful factor in improving English language skills. The EAP learners are the adults (Cercone, 2008; Miroballi, 2010; & Tahir, 2012). The age of most of the EAP learners is over 18 and they know what they need to learn; what is lacking in them and what they want to learn; they know well what they are and what they want to be (Gillett & Wray, 2006). According to Parker (2004), "adults can be good foreign language learners, and more so when their particular aptitudes and needs are taken into account" (p. 9). Knowles (1984) believes that "as a person matures he or she becomes ready to learn when they experience a need to know something" (p. 12). They use their experience to construct and gain knowledge and their self-motivation helps them to learn effectively with a good pace.

This section presented the first theme which discussed participants' responses regarding their English language proficiency before and after taking the current EAP, the factors that facilitated them most in improving their English language

proficiency. Following is the second theme, the assessment and evaluation, which is further divided into three sub themes.

4.2 Assessment and Evaluation

This section discusses the second theme, assessment and evaluation. The theme is broken down into three subthemes which deal with the participants' satisfaction level with their result of assessment and evaluation, their perceptions regarding the current assessment and evaluation pattern; and their suggestions for assessment and evaluation.

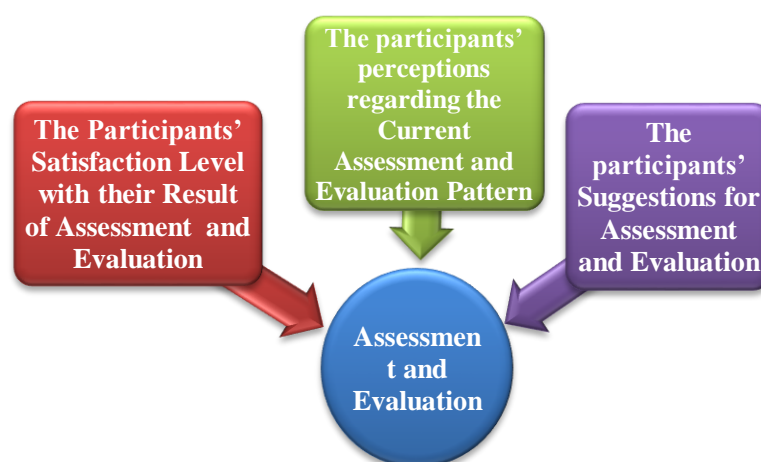


Figure 3: Theme 2- Assessment and Evaluation

4.2.1 The Participants' Satisfaction Level with their Result of Assessment and Evaluation

Majority of the participants stated that they were satisfied with their Part I result of Remedial English, while some of the participants are satisfied to a little extent and few were not satisfied with their Part I result of Remedial English. The participants disclosed that they were satisfied with their result of Remedial English for the reason that they used to attend the teacher's lectures and do self-study and secured good marks. They added that they were given outlines of the topics covered in the semesters. One of them told that:

'we needed to go home and search some supplementary material for writing. When one adds some extra material one gets good marks.'

Some expressed that they were satisfied because they got the result according to their efforts or study. The reasons told by the participants behind their dissatisfaction or little satisfaction with their results are that they were not given class participation marks. According to them viva should have been taken and their regularity should have been considered.

4.2.2 The participants' perceptions regarding the Current Assessment and Evaluation Pattern

All the interviewed departments have same pattern or design of assessment. Participants told that the paper consists of comprehension, summary of a text given in the book, report writing, essay writing, dialogue writing, and a question from grammatical structures. The syllabus is divided into two semesters. One of the participants shared,

'paper (exam) pattern was good. It was conceptual but only those students who were already good at English grammar could have done the paper. There was no place for rote learning. It was totally creative.'

Another respondent stated that:

'the teacher gave us comprehension in which vocabulary was very difficult. Those words were very high from our level. Those words were never read and seen before. We knew only two to three words out of eight or nine underlined words.'

This supports the relevant findings of Hayes and Read (2004), who discovered that the most complicated section of the test for the students was the reading section because of unfamiliar vocabulary.

Next are presented the participants' suggestions for the pattern of assessment and evaluation in the EAP course.

4.2.3 The Participants' Suggestions for Assessment and Evaluation

Here is mentioned the participants' suggestions for the pattern of assessment and evaluation in the EAP course. According to the participants, some more questions

regarding grammatical structures should be included in exam. As one of the participants suggested that:

'more grammar should be included then students would pay more attention to grammar. If students don't know correct grammar then how they could be able to write essay and dialogues etc.'

Regarding the paper pattern the participants suggested constructing the Remedial paper pattern like that of CSS (Central Superior Service), as it was noted by one of them that:

'the paper should be based on CSS paper pattern. If we go for CSS, we must be prepared.'

One of the students suggested that there should be marks on speaking and class performance that to what extent a student is active in class. While we have three hours in exam, any student can write after thinking so much. Marking on class performance is favored by many students because, they added, sometimes students have personal and psychological problem by dint of them they are not able to give their best performance in written or final exam, while they give their best performance in classes. So, those students lose marks due to being judged on written exam and final exam excluding class performance. One of the students suggested that

'50% marks should be given on viva. There should be marks on class performance, presentations and assignments. Its reason is that if one of the best students of the class shows his best performance in the class activities and unfortunately due to any personal problems he/she cannot perform well enough in exams then gets less marks, on the other hand those who are not good in class and, never participate in class activities or presentations etc. they just get good marks due to rote learning and written exam.'

The majority of the participants were satisfied with the examination pattern but not with the number of questions included in the examination paper. They noted that

balance should be there between the test questions and the time duration. One of the interviewees declared that “one question should have been skipped because there was much pressure so we couldn’t do”. Another participant was found to have the same view regarding the length of the paper. He explained that:

‘it depends on a student that how he prepares himself/herself for the exam. But the paper was lengthy, so students got pressurized that this had to be written.. ...that had to be written. We knew the answers but we were confused because of timing that we had to write summary, essay, report, etc.’

This finding is found similar with the findings of study of Üstünel & Kaplan (2015) in which the greater part of the undergraduates declared their frustration with the writing section of the examination as the students found it difficult and impracticable to complete the writing section in the time allotted to them. It was also proposed by the majority of the students that there should be given those words that were already taught and discussed in the class.

Some of the participants recommended taking more and short assignments. As one of them noted,

‘assignment should consist of 1 to 2 pages which should be written by the students themselves. More assignments should be given to students as assignments develop creativity and because of assignments students do self-study, so pressure should be given to students.’

The findings are found in line with the view of Anderson et al. (2009) that the assignments designed “for students should be challenging but not intimidating or overwhelming” (p. 89). It is also noted by Anderson et al. (2009) that “particularly early in the term, it can be useful to have many, smaller assignments as opposed to few, larger ones. Shorter assignments seem less intimidating to students” (p. 90). One of the participants recommended that English Grammar Composition by Wren and Martin should also be used in Part I.

5. Conclusion

The EAP course played an important role in developing and increasing the students' English language proficiency as the teachers provided them the environment in which they could learn English and they improved their speaking skills and confidence because they got the opportunity to speak English in the class. Participants starting with poor proficiency at university increased their proficiency level to a little extent. Few participants of the present study mentioned that their level has not changed, as they had already taken advanced level of English course from English language centres. The teacher, the EAP book, and self-study altogether facilitated them in improving their English proficiency at the university. Majority was highly satisfied with their assessment results. For assessment, almost all the departments of the university have similar design of exam paper. The students suggested a paper pattern like that of CSS (Central Superior Service) Exam, with a few other ideas like balance between test questions and time duration. The findings are applicable to the context of the study. The EAP teachers should provide motivational and encouraging environment for the effective learning of the learners. The suggestion provided by the learners in the study need to be considered carefully for the effective and efficient implementation of the EAP course at the university. In the study, data was collected only from learners, future researchers can collect data from the EAP teachers, course designers and policy makers to improve and make the EAP course effective.

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