



RESEARCH PAPER

From Classroom to Practice: ESP-based Needs Analysis for Psychology Students

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to conduct a needs analysis for psychology students regarding an English for Specific Purposes (ESP) course, and it seeks to identify the English language requirements associated with the professional careers of psychology students and to examine their specific linguistic needs at the University of Gujrat. Additionally, it investigates the gaps present in their current general English course. This study is limited to undergraduate students and faculty members of the Psychology department. The General English courses taught to psychology students focus on grammar and related linguistic features. These courses do not adequately prepare students for discipline-specific tasks. Therefore, a gap exists between academic preparation and professional practice. To address this issue, the study employed a mixed-methods approach. The data for this study were collected by using both quantitative and qualitative approaches. One hundred students from the BS psychology program are selected to complete the questionnaire, and three teachers from the psychology department are chosen for interviews as part of the study's sample. The collected data is then analyzed with the help of needs analysis theory (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). The analysis indicates that general English courses fail to meet students' needs for using English in professional settings. These courses teach them grammar, syntax, and other linguistic features and do not focus on the specific use of the English language in psychology. There is a noticeable gap between professional use of English and general courses that can be addressed by adding an ESP course. Cooperation between English language instructors and psychology faculty is suggested for developing a curriculum that prepares students for academic and professional success.

KEYWORDS English for Specific Purposes, Needs, Demands, Professional Field, General English Courses, Technical Vocabulary

Introduction

English has evolved as a universally accepted global language over the last few decades. It is used as a lingua franca globally. The acceptance of the English language has increased its importance across different aspects of life. This progress in the English language has created a need for tailored language instruction, particularly in various specialized fields (Yasmin et al. 2016). This change has elevated the importance of ESP (English for Specific Purposes). ESP is centered on designing specified, tailored instructions in English for a particular field. It also provides instruction about designing such teaching material that can fulfill the requirements of the students (Nooruddin & Yasmin, 2019). As Hutchinson and Waters (1987) define ESP as "an approach to language teaching in which all decisions as to content and method are based on the learner's reason for learning." ESP has gained greater importance in various arenas, establishing itself as an essential part of academic and professional life.

Psychology is a branch of science that focuses on the study of the mind. Psychologists require strong communication skills, as their work involves conducting communicative sessions with clients. They need the ability to understand the psychological problems of people through conversations and give them mental training for improvement. Their field demands an understanding of human psychology. For this purpose, students of psychology

need to build up strong communication skills in the English language. They need specific courses and sessions that provide them the opportunity to become capable of solving issues through talkative sessions, specifically when working with patients who speak and understand English. ESP for psychology helps students clearly understand their target. They learn specific vocabulary through ESP. Psychology has its terminology and vocabulary. Psychology students must attain the knowledge to address the patients' issues. This study provides a survey about the English language needs of psychology students at the University of Gujrat (UOG).

Needs analysis is a method to identify the needs of students related to a specific field, and it is the first step of course design. For psychology students, a need for English related to their field exists in both academic and professional settings, including therapy sessions, educational sessions, and interdisciplinary associations. There are some specific terminologies, genres, and discourse patterns used in the field of psychology. Thus, a thorough needs analysis helps determine the current English proficiency of students within their field and assesses whether the current level is useful for their professional life. As Basturkmen (2015) explained, "A well-conducted needs analysis provides a sound foundation for course design by identifying what learners need to do with English."

The University of Gujrat (UOG) does not offer ESP courses in psychology; a thorough needs analysis in psychology will help to identify the need for ESP-tailored courses at the psychology department. The field of psychology is evolving rapidly and has become interwoven with technology. It encompasses different types of specialization, including clinical psychology, educational psychology, and industrial psychology. All of these involve different types of linguistic features and specific vocabulary that students need to understand. The goal of this study is to understand the demands and necessities of psychology students related to the specific use of the English language by conducting a thorough needs analysis. As Graves explained, "Courses that result from a rigorous needs analysis are more likely to be motivating, relevant, and effective for learners" (Graves, 2000, p. 12).

Literature Review

The main purpose of ESP is to make the course relevant to the study's goal. It primarily emphasizes creating tailored language instructions that distinguish the ESP course from a general English course. It addresses the needs of the context where learners must apply their knowledge. "English for Specific Purposes (ESP) has long been recognized as a learner-centered approach to language teaching, rooted in the specific needs of a particular group of learners" (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). Need analysis is "the process of determining the needs for which a learner or group of learners requires a language" (Richards, 2001, p. 51). A thorough needs analysis can help connect the professional world with classroom learning.

The importance of needs analysis in ESP for psychology rests on students' need to understand technical vocabulary, complex texts, and research communication. According to Lilienfeld et al. (2017), it is essential to address the challenges faced by Psychology students, including interpreting terminology, understanding abstract concepts, and analyzing scholarly contexts related to psychology. He found that a general course cannot meet the demands of the professional world. Recent studies also support this idea. For example, Syaufika & Ambarwati (2023) found that the comprehension of technical vocabulary and reading of academic texts are the needs of psychology students in the Indonesian context. The general English courses could fulfill the needs of the students. Thus, there was a need for the inclusion of an ESP course in their academic studies. Kuteeva and Airey (2019) found that Psychology students need oral communication skills in their educational contexts.

As a branch of social science, psychology has specific communication demands. Psychological text is often based on specified terminologies, statistical descriptions, operational definitions, and empirical claims. All these demands of psychological study are embedded in highly nominalized structures. According to Hyland (2022), this type of writing requires that learners demonstrate fluency in vocabulary, communication, and argumentation. ESP courses equip students with skills to perform in those areas where general English courses often fall short. Mahmoodi and Mozaffari (2021) conducted a needs analysis for psychology undergraduates in Iran and found that the major needs were the ability to read and interpret journal articles and understand psychological constructs in English. They concluded that ESP for psychology must integrate genre instruction, focusing on how psychological knowledge is constructed through specific language patterns and rhetorical moves.

Furthermore, various studies have found a gap between the teachers' perceptions of students' needs and students' perceptions of their needs in a course. According to Hansel (1996), psychology students need to communicate with various people, and their coursework should include strategies that train them to meet the demands of the professional field. These findings highlighted the need for an ESP course with a specific focus on spoken skills.

Nowadays, electronic ESP is gaining popularity across various fields. The use of digital media is increasing in psychology; that's why electronic ESP in psychology has evolved. According to Noor et al. (2022), the use of digital resources, including PsycINFO, academic databases, and referencing tools, resulted in increased confidence among students. "Students felt more empowered in their academic tasks when they were taught to navigate digital databases and manage citations using reference software." This reinforces the concept that using electronic ESP in psychology courses can enhance language learning outcomes.

Material and Methods

This study implies a mixed-method approach to data collection. The researcher collected quantitative data from the students. She selected one hundred students as a sample for the study from the BS psychology department. She designed a questionnaire including fifteen questions. There are three research questions that this study aims to answer. Thus, this questionnaire is divided into three parts, each including five questions. The first part of the questionnaire is designed to address the first research question. The researcher distributed the questionnaire to the students and collected data from them. Moreover, the researcher also conducted interviews with the psychology department teachers to record their views regarding the students' language needs. This qualitative approach helps identify the gap between the demands of the professional world and the classroom instructions. It also focuses on the specific demand of the professional field of psychology. The purpose of this research is to identify students' English language needs that are not addressed by general English courses and to determine the requirements for ESP psychology courses that can address these needs. The needs analysis theory (Richards, 2001) is used to identify the specific needs and demands of psychology students.

Results and Discussion

The researcher collected both quantitative and qualitative data to gain a comprehensive understanding of the students' English language needs. The quantitative data is gathered with the help of open-ended questionnaires from the students of BS Psychology. This questionnaire was designed to understand the demands of the students. It focuses on understanding whether the general English courses are sufficient to fulfill the English requirements of learners in BS psychology, or if there is a need for specific ESP courses.

The first part of the questionnaire focused on the needs of students that motivated their enrollment in a psychology course. According to Hutchinson and Waters (1987) and Dudley-Evans and St John (1998), one of the most important parts of needs analysis is “present situation analysis”. It helps in understanding the present situation of the learners. It aims to identify what learners already know and what their further demands are. It also focuses on finding out the demands of the professional world. Table 1 illustrates the findings as follows:

Table 1
Professional Demands Related to the English Language

Professional Demands Related to the English Language				
1.	How often do you use English in professional settings (e.g., internships, clinical work, presentations)?			
Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
27%	53%	15%	5%	0%
2.	Which English skill do you struggle with the most in your psychology studies?			
Reading skills	Writing skills	Speaking skills	Listening skills	
15%	25%	30%	30%	
3.	I need fluency in the English language for better career options.			
Agree	Strongly agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	undecided
40%	50%	3%	2%	5%
4.	Rate your confidence in using English for professional psychology purposes.			
Not confident at all	Slightly confident	Very confident	Undecided	
20%	45%	20%	15%	
5.	What professional English tasks do you expect to perform most frequently?			
Reading research articles	Writing reports	Conducting interviews	Conducting sessions	
25%	25%	25%	25%	

This table analyses the ratio of English language usage in professional settings related to psychology. The responses show that 53% of students often, 15% sometimes, 5% rarely, and 27% always use the English language in their professional lives. There is a single student who has never used the English language in their professional life,

The analysis indicates that 30% of students struggle with speaking skills, and an equal percentage have difficulty with listening skills. Writing skills are considered the second most important skill for improvement, as 25% of students face difficulty in writing skills. This data analysis helps to understand the skill-specific demands of the students

A greater group, 90% (40% agree, 50% strongly agree) of students consider it important for better performance in professional life. Only 5% (3% disagree, 2% strongly disagree) of the students disagree with the importance of the English language, which may depend on their thinking patterns. Whereas, 5% of the students were undecided. This type of analysis supports learners’ awareness of their own target needs, which is key in needs analysis

Only 20% of students reported lacking confidence in using the English language in the field of psychology. While 45% reported a moderate level of confidence, 15% were undecided about their confidence level, and the remaining 35% reported insufficient confidence in their English language skills in professional settings related to psychology. This type of analysis helps in understanding the students’ current situation and in designing instructional strategies based on students’ demands. It confirms the students’ need for confidence-building and practice-based ESP modules

The analysis shows that students expect to conduct therapy sessions, conduct interviews, write reports, and read research articles in the same ratio. This analysis highlights students’ multifunctional needs related to the presentation of psychological content in English

Table 2
Specific English Language Needs

6. How often do you read psychology-related content in English?				
Never	Rarely	Always	Frequently	Sometimes
0%	0%	20%	80%	0%
7. I can fully understand psychology-related terminology in English.				
Agree	Strongly agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Undecided
25%	20%	23%	17%	15%
8. I need more support in improving my English for psychology-specific tasks.				
Agree	Strongly agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Undecided
50%	15%	0%	30%	5%
9. Which academic English tasks are most difficult for you?				
Writing assignments/reports	Reading complex texts	Participating in class discussions	Giving presentations	Understanding lectures
15%	15%	20%	35%	15%
10. Which English skill do you struggle with the most in your psychology studies?				
Speaking skills	Reading skills	Writing skills	Listening skills	
30%	25%	15%	30%	

The analysis shows that 100% (20% always, 80% frequently) of students use the English language for reading psychology-related content. This analysis reflects the learning needs of English by emphasizing the importance of the English language. The analysis shows the current level of students' understanding related to the subject-specific vocabulary. Analysis shows that 45% (25% agree, 20% strongly agree) of students can understand the subject-specific vocabulary, while 40% (23% disagree, 17% strongly disagree) fail in it. So, there is a need to add a course tailored to the students' needs.

Analysis shows that a clear majority, 65% of the students, want additional support, as stated in Table 2. This analysis highlights the students' limited ability to perform and recognize their need to enhance task-based language. It analyses a gap between passive understanding and active usage, a common issue in ESP contexts.

The analysis shows that giving presentations is the most challenging task, as 35% of students face difficulty, while 20% of students struggle with class discussions. The level of difficulty in writing assignments or reports, reading complex texts, and giving presentations is the same. This aligns with the demand in psychology for theoretical and technical readings. Presentation and lecture comprehension difficulties point to listening and speaking struggles in formal academic settings.

The analysis shows that which English skills students struggle with most in their psychology studies. The analysis highlights that students have more difficulty with speaking and listening skills (see also Banaras & Yasmin, 2025). So, there is a need to enhance their competence in these skills, which are significant because both are key to professional and academic performance in psychology. Writing is the least concerning, though it may still require improvement. This analysis shows the importance of oral fluency for psychology students.

Table 3
Lacks in Current English Courses

11. My English courses include psychology-related vocabulary and examples.				
Agree	Strongly agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Neutral
5%	0%	40%	45%	15%
12. The general English language curriculum is relevant to my major psychology courses.				
Agree	Strongly agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Neutral
0%	0%	45%	40%	15%
13. I have been taught how to read and write psychological reports in English classes.				

Agree	Strongly agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Neutral
0%	0%	40%	45%	15%
14. How helpful are your current English courses in preparing you for psychology studies?				
Not helpful	Slightly helpful	Very helpful	Extremely helpful	
65%	25%	10%	0%	
15. What type of improvement would you prefer in your English courses?				
Add psychology-specific content	Include more speaking/listening practice	Teach academic writing for psychology	psychology Focus more on reading and vocabulary	No improvement is needed
30%	20%	25%	25%	0%

The questionnaire analyses the function of general English courses in improving psychology-related vocabulary and examples. The analysis reveals that 5% of students believe these courses include psychology-related vocabulary and examples. While 40% disagree and 45% strongly disagree. It suggests that general English courses only teach general concepts of the English language and do not include psychology-related vocabulary as part of it. This analysis indicates a gap between the real-world needs of the English language and current language instruction.

The analysis indicates that the general English courses are not relevant to the psychological demands of the English language, where 0% of students agreed that the general English language curriculum is relevant to psychology courses. While 45% disagree, and 40% strongly disagree with the general English curriculum when compared to the content of major psychology courses. It suggests that a general English course teaches the general concepts of the English language; it does not enhance students' ability to use the English language in a professional setting. This analysis highlights a gap between the general English course and the development of English proficiency in psychology.

The analyses whether students have been taught to read and write psychological reports in English classes. A combined 85% (45% disagree and 40% strongly disagree) expressed that they had not been taught these skills, suggesting a significant gap in the English curriculum regarding subject-specific academic writing; 0% of students agreed or strongly agreed, showing that none of the participants felt positively about being taught this content. Only a small percentage (15%) selected neutral, indicating limited uncertainty or no clear opinion

The analysis highlights that these studies lack in this matter; 65% of students stated that current English courses fail to prepare students for studying psychology in English, and 25% of students consider it slightly helpful. Only 10% of students answered that current English courses help prepare students for psychology studies. Understanding the lack in the general English courses is the crucial step in needs analysis. This study helps understand that the majority of students perceived that these general courses lacked in this matter

The analysis indicates that students need to improve multiple areas of study, with a high need for improvement in psychology-specific content in English, and 30% of students expressed a wish in this area. The need for improvement in reading and vocabulary, and English-specific academic writing for psychology is the same, with each domain accounting for 25%. Finally, there is a need to enhance the listening and speaking skills related to psychology content in English. This needs analysis highlights that the current English course falls short of meeting the required requirements in these areas

To collect additional information about the students' English language needs in psychology, the researcher conducted interviews with the teachers. These interviews were divided into three sections. Each section is designed to address one research question. The collected information was then analyzed according to the three steps of data analysis: data reduction, data display, and conclusion.

The first section of the interview focuses on assessing the students' current abilities. The analysis of teachers' responses shows that students can read different reports and understand them, but they often fail to translate certain parts of the report; they are not competent to understand all parts of reports without translation. They cannot take therapy sessions in English only; they need to use their national or cultural language. It highlights the lack of proficiency among students in using the English language in the professional field of psychology.

The second section of the interview was conducted to understand the specific English language needs of psychology students. The analysis of teachers' responses indicates that students have an understanding of multiple psychological concepts, but they fail to represent them in the English language. This gap between conceptual understanding and linguistic representation echoes findings from studies, where learners grapple with transferring meaning across languages and contexts (Irshad & Yasmin, 2023). The main role of a psychiatrist is to assist patients through verbal communication. They must understand the issues of patients and provide recommendations tailored to their needs, emphasizing the importance of enhancing students' ability to communicate in English in the field of psychology. Students generally have a good understanding of the concept of writing reports and other psychological concepts, but targeted English instruction may further improve their reading skills. The need for structured training sessions to strengthen these reading abilities is present.

The third part of the interview uncovers the shortcomings of general English courses. Analysis shows that the current method of teaching helps students to grasp psychological concepts through other subjects, but general English courses do not contribute to this. These English courses are just intended to guide them on grammar and sentence structure. These general courses lack training in English in professional contexts. These general English courses do not strengthen the communication skills required in the psychology field. Courses fail to improve the students' confidence in conveying their ideas in the English language.

Discussion

The data analysis indicates a significant gap between students' general English learning and the specific linguistic requirements of their academic and professional contexts in psychology.

The first part of the questionnaire revealed that students value English not only as students, but especially in professional psychology environments. Almost 90% of survey respondents believe that English fluency will directly assist them in their future work, including reading patient reports, interviewing, and undergoing treatment. It suggests that English for Special Purposes (ESP) instruction is necessary to prepare students to communicate in the real professional world. The analysis also highlighted speaking and listening as the most important skills, which are consistent with the knowledge and diagnostic nature of psychological practice. Furthermore, students confessed to having limited confidence in their English communicative skills. This lack of confidence can be attributed to a lack of practice opportunities. Similar challenges of expressing subject knowledge in English have been noted in discourse and translation studies, where learners often understand concepts but struggle to articulate them confidently in English (Irshad & Yasmin, 2025a; Irshad & Yasmin, 2025b).

In Part 2 of the questionnaire, students' target needs for improving English skills were further confirmed. They expressed a need for further support in reading psychological texts, understanding vocabulary related to specific subjects, and developing task-based language skills. The communicative demands of the field are reflected in the students' self-

identified weaknesses in presentation skills and class discussions, and serve to support the integration of skills in ESP programs.

In Part 3, the findings identify a deep flaw in the existing general English curriculum. None of the students found that the general English courses they were taking included psychology-related topics. In reality, though, 85% of students actively disagreed with the idea that their courses supported the development of psychology-specific vocabulary or knowledge. This highlights a need to reframe English instruction based on the ESP framework.

These quantitative findings were positively supported and extended by the qualitative data that were collected from teacher interviews. Teachers believe that students can make sense of psychological content to some extent, but most cannot articulate concepts in English outside of translation. It implies that the students had subject knowledge but lacked the linguistic resources to express it in professional or academic contexts.

Overall, the results of the interview highlight that general English instruction is insufficient to develop the specific communication skills needed by the students in psychology. The results strongly support the creation of ESP courses for psychology students: to improve communication skills, to develop vocabulary needed for the use of English in the academic and professional world, and to increase confidence in the use of English in the academic and professional world. Similar concerns about the limits of general English instruction and the importance of structured course design have also been observed in Pakistani higher education, where students often remain reliant on teacher-directed learning and face barriers to developing autonomy (Yasmin, Naseem & Masso, 2019; Yasmin & Sohail, 2018).

Conclusion

The goal of this study is to analyze the English language needs of the psychology department. The expected outcome of this study is to increase students' awareness of the English language needs within the field of psychology. Hutchinson & Waters (1987) describe the needs analysis as the most useful tool to identify the need for an ESP course. They posit, "any course should be based on an analysis of learners' needs. This is the logical starting point for any ESP course" (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987, p. 53). According to the data analysis, the curriculum and instruction necessary to assist students in addressing the issues of the professional field of psychology are not included in the general English classes. The students in this field are required to perform multiple tasks. The responses of teachers and students support the view that students in general English courses face difficulties across all communication skills. The general English courses do not provide instruction for using the English language in a professional context. The students often lack competence and proficiency, which results in low self-esteem and confidence. Their current English courses do not train them to interact with patients who are English language users. The study concludes that to improve students' confidence and performance in the professional field of psychology, English-specific courses (ESP) in psychology should be implemented. It will close the gap between general English classes and the practical requirements within the field of psychology.

Recommendations

It is recommended to introduce an ESP course for Psychology students to cater to linguistic needs based on their discipline. Furthermore, collaboration between English language instructors and psychology faculty is recommended for developing a curriculum that prepares students for academic and professional success. Finally, existing General English courses should be updated or supplemented to connect academic preparation with professional practice.

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