A Needs Analysis of English for Specific Purpose Course for the Personal Assistants (PAs) to HoDs of University Departments

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ABSTRACT

Language is an essential tool of communication. The English language is a lingua franca that is regarded as the most important source of communication worldwide in all spheres of life. English has taken center stage in every aspect of human life, whether it be in business, academics, or entertainment. The main objective of this study is to make an analysis of the needs of teaching English for specific purposes for the personal assistants (PAs) to HoDs of various university departments. 20 personal assistants (PAs) to HoDs of various departments from two different universities in Faisalabad, Pakistan, i.e., the University of Agriculture Faisalabad and Government College University Faisalabad, were chosen as the sample for the study in this investigation. The data has been elicited with a semi-structured questionnaire, and the elicited data is analyzed with Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 27. The data shows that for the PAs to successfully carry out the tasks entrusted to them, speaking and listening skill development is essential. E-mail writing is an essential component of their jobs. Similarly, writing business letters is a common and frequent practice. Likewise, speaking English and English grammar are the most significant skills used by the personal assistants to conduct their official responsibilities; therefore, it is recommended that, in light of the findings of the current research study, an ESP course be designed and taught to the personal assistants to HoDs of university departments in order to help them cover up their English language proficiency and carry out their assigned duties more effectively.

Keywords: *English for Specific Purpose (ESP), Needs Analysis, personal assistants (PAs) to HoDs, Universities of Pakistan.*

INTRODUCTION

To succeed in any area of life in the present era of technology, one must have strong language skills in English (Crystal, 2003). In the professional and academic realms of life, one must be proficient in both spoken and written English. In business and trade, computing and electronics, engineering, and the medical sciences, English is the most extensively used language. Many nations, including the UK, the USA, Canada, and Australia, have English as their primary language. Additionally, English is now the primary language of communication in almost all of the world's nations. It has become a crucial component of worldwide schooling, and materials for learning even incorporate it as a second language.

English for specific purpose refers to a special approach to teaching the language where the needs of the students are prioritized and the course materials are focused on terminology, register, and content unique to a specified field of study. It was created following World War II when all of the devastated nations sought to rebuild themselves and needed technology to aid in enhancing their infrastructure. Due to the fact that technology originated in English-speaking nations like the UK,

USA, and Canada, English became the language of technology. The search for natural oil in the 1960s necessitated the development of an international language for workers, technicians, engineers, and oil refiners to communicate in. This was another factor in the development of ESP. In the 1960s, English for Specific Purpose courses were originally developed and offered to instruct these technical oil-seeking workers. In the current period, numerous schools and universities in Europe and America offer ESP courses leading to both certificates and degrees. One of the most modern approaches to designing a syllabus is ESP. Here, the importance of the learners' communication needs is paramount. These courses, according to Mian and Sarwar (2016), are developed by taking into account or emphasizing all necessary elements of the language that are advantageous to its users.

Personal assistants (PAs) who work with heads of departments (HoDs) in various university departments need to be proficient in English. The significance of the English language in this function is defined by a few important features. First and foremost, clarity and precision are crucial since personal assistants must effectively and accurately communicate complicated information. As they interact with people from different academic backgrounds and may need to flip between formal and casual communication styles, flexibility is essential. Thirdly, given the intellectual nature of institutions, a solid command of academic jargon and terminology is crucial. In addition, it takes exceptional communication abilities to write emails, reports, and other types of documents. Finally, since personal assistants frequently handle delicate departmental affairs, caution and skill in managing confidential material are necessary. In conclusion, having fluent English is a requirement for personal assistants to HoDs in academic institutions. It also includes having clarity, adaptability, academic strength, communication skills, and a strong sense of professionalism.

The study will be aimed at obtaining the following research objectives:
i)   To find out the relevance between professional responsibilities and the English for Specific Purpose course for personal assistants (PAs) to HoDs of various university departments.
ii)   To look into English language skills more frequently used by personal assistants (PAs) to HoDs of different university departments.

The study will focus on finding out the answers to the following research questions:

i)   How are the responsibilities performed by personal assistants (PAs) to HoDs of different departments at universities relevant to the English for Specific Purpose course?
ii)   Which English language skills are more frequently used by personal assistants (PAs) to HoDs of different university departments?

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In the work of Pullum et al. (1996) Bloch and Trager (1942) claim that our lives would not exist without language. Language is a collection of verbal symbols that have been randomly put together to promote interaction between communities that are in contact with one another. It acts as a platform for individual creativity. It serves to represent our culture and personality. The number of languages spoken in the world now is estimated to be 7100, with 1132 million people using English as their primary language. Every person speaks differently from others, with different style and pronunciation. That is why there are numerous dialects and variations of the English language in the world today. Nonetheless, linguists frequently divide them into three distinct categories:

i)   British English: This dialect includes the several dialects of English used in the UK, including Cockney, RP, Scouse, Geordie, and others.

ii) American English: This variety of the language is based on the many varieties of English that are spoken in the United States, including Southern American English, New England English, African American Vernacular English (AAVE), and many more.

iii) Other Englishes: This dialect is based on a variety of the English language spoken in other parts of the world, including Australia, Canada, India, Nigeria, and other places.

In the 1960s, ESP (English for Specific Purposes), as a separate subject, began to gain ground. The subject has advanced significantly in recent years from its original goal of meeting the unique language and communication needs of members of various communities that emerge in certain professional and vocational settings. ESP developed as a result of a) the growth of the world economy, b) new technological advancements, and c) a surge in students studying abroad in nations that speak English (Hutchinson and Waters, 1987, pp. 6–7). The international community realized that learning English was essential for communication on a global scale, not just for the purpose of passing along knowledge (Johns and Evans, 1991:301). The first impetus for ESP is provided by an analysis of the technical jargon of a specific field of profession or academia. The purpose of an ESP instructor, according to Smoak (2003), is "to impart the technical vocabulary of a particular profession" (p. 23). Although this in-depth analysis of language in a variety of registers showed a very early and favorable interest in functional lexis, it also showed a great care for form and provided little explanation for how each phrase was formed. The 1970s and 1980s saw a rise in the ESP movement. According to Hutchinson and Waters, In order for ESP students to finally become autonomous learners, mentorship is necessary for them to build "underlying competence" (1987, p. 70). According to Dudley-Evans & St. John, Hutchinson and Waters provided a "learner-centered approach" that places a significant value on how to learn and highlights harnessing an individual's inbuilt capabilities (1987:25). During the last two decades, there has been an increased acceptance of ESP around the world. As mentioned by Hewings (2002) studies on ESP are becoming more popular as academic subjects, as seen by the rise in their number being undertaken in nations besides America and Englih, as Hong Kong, China, Japan and Australia etc. According to Johns (1998) EAP and EOP make up the ESP, which is moving toward specialization. According to Hewings (2002) ESP courses employ the strategy of discourse analysis, where the needs of ESP learners are effectively met by recognizing the real communicative context of the learners. In the last couple of decades, a rise in the number of publications in the field of ESP has been observed. As Johns (2013) asserts, the rising research into ESP helped to establish the previously presented theories of ESP and their application in the modern world of English language teaching. Similarly, more focus has been placed on international rhetoric and learner genre awareness in ESP.

In the past 50 years of ELT, ESP has emerged as a distinct area of English language instruction. Initially emphasizing the teaching of industry-specific jargon, ESP has since moved on to employ rhetorical techniques from discourse analysis. Then, with the use of needs assessment studies, the four talents that had been ignored by all of the other study methodologies were evaluated and addressed. EAP and EOP are the two separate subfields of English for Specific Purposes (ESP). English for academic purposes is referred to as EAP, while English for professional purposes is referred to as EOP. The goal of both types of ESP is to meet the academic and professional communication needs of English language learners, specifically the academic communicative needs of English language learners through EAP and the professional communicative needs of English language learners through EOP.

The first skill needed for efficient communication, according to Cummins (1979), is the capacity to use the specialized jargon particular to that professional milieu. The second is the mastery

of a wider range of academic abilities, including memo writing and research. This was largely due to the health science group's adaptation to the new culture. Third, you ought to be able to speak plainly and concisely in any circumstance. Conversations over coffee with coworkers often resemble conversations with friends. The responsibility for ensuring that all three of these talents are addressed in the lesson plans and taught simultaneously rests on the ESP instructors. The first stage in creating English for specific purposes courses is doing a needs analysis. The goal of constructing ESP courses is to address the academic and professional communication goals of English learners rather than concentrating on the English language's grammatical structures; therefore, the communicative needs are analyzed using needs analysis. The idea of analyzing the student's linguistic needs as an overview for developing courses, according to Mc Donough (1984), "has nearly become associated with ESP" (p. 29). Participants in a needs analysis include the following parties: English language teachers, the curriculum board, English language learners, the ministry of education, and course designers.

According to Basturkmen (2010), due to the fact that ESP students are seen in the context of their school or career and because ESP places more emphasis on language learners' academic or professional demands than on their personal needs, the perspective of ESP is somewhat more limited than that of general English. Yalden (1987) presents his model for designing an English for Specific Purposes course, where he places needs analysis as the very first step to designing an ESP course. According to him, analysis of needs is a systemic process that deals with recognizing the communicative needs of either students or professionals in a specific field of study or profession.

Needs analysis for creating and teaching an ESP course has been the subject of much study, but some of the most notable work has been listed here. Aliakbari and Boghayeri (2014) analyzed the ESP course needs of the students of architecture. They used 48 current and 72 passed-out students from the field of architecture. The method used for data collection was a questionnaire. They found out that the most important skills of the English language for these students were reading skill, writing skill, speaking skill, and listening skill, respectively. In 2020, Asrifan et al. carried out an evaluation of needs for students studying the tourist sector. For the elicited data, they used a qualitative-descriptive approach. According to them, the most crucial topics for the curriculum are English speaking and pronunciation of technical tourism jargon, while media films and pictures are the second skill that ESP tourism students require. According to them, reading and listening are the third and fourth important skills that should be included in the tourism curriculum for students in Malaysia. Kaur and Khan (2010) analyzed the English language needs of art and design students. They selected 47 students and 10 teachers for their survey. According to the findings of this research, speaking was the most important skill for the students of art and design, whereas listening was rated as the second most important skill. Reading and writing skills in English were regarded as 'fairly important' by 80% of the respondents. Alsamadani's (2017) study was aimed at defining the English language needs of engineering students. He selected 200 students from the fields of civil engineering and industrial engineering from Umm Al-Qura University. He collected data from a questionnaire, an interview, and observation. The findings of this study revealed that receptive skills (i.e., reading and listening) were mostly focused on in ESP classes. It has also been reported that writing, reading, and speaking skills were needed more than others. Li and Fu (2021) also worked on a study of the English language requirements for college students in the business and engineering departments. Closed-ended questionnaires were used by them to obtain data. Ibrahim (2020) conducted an English language needs assessment for the students of medical sciences at Al-Neelain University. Students and teachers of medical sciences were the sample for this study. The data was analyzed with a descriptive approach. A questionnaire was used for data collection, and the data was presented using the percentage method. According to the findings of this data, the medical students were especially weak in speaking and listening skills. The researcher also highlighted some recommendations for

designing an ESP course for the students medical scieces. Yalden's model of ESP course designing is given in the lines below: The researcher also highlighted some recommendations for designing an ESP course for the students medical scieces. Yalden's model of ESP course designing is given in the lines below:

YALDEN'S (1987) MODEL FOR DESIGNING AN ESP COURSE
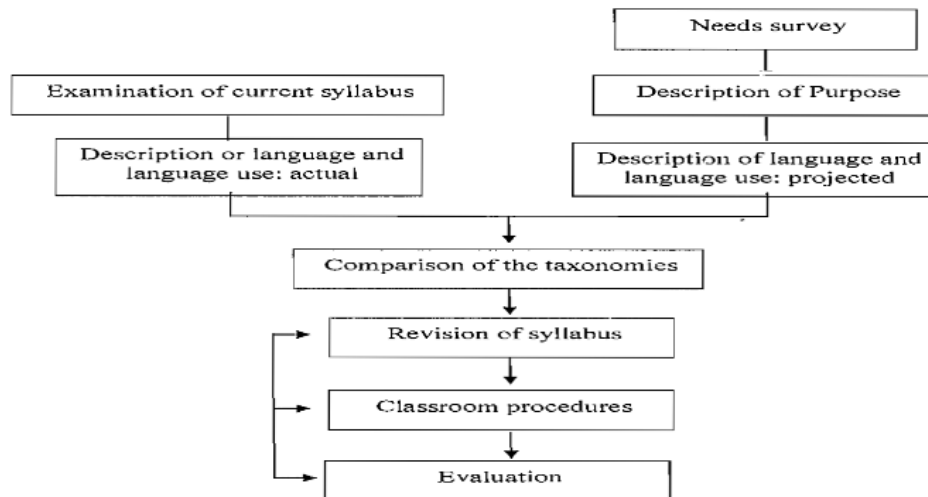
A needs analysis, a description of the purpose, a description of language and language use, an examination of the current syllabus, a description of language use in practice, a comparison of taxonomies, a revision of the syllabus, classroom procedure, and evaluation are the steps involved in Yalden's (1987) model of ESP course design. The goal of the current study is to determine if PAs to HoDs need to take an English for Special Purpose course. The other processes in the model of Yalden (1987), including taxonomy comparison, course design, delivery, and evaluation, have not been incorporated into the process of the current study.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A needs analysis of the English for specific purpose course for the personal assistants (PAs) to HoDs has been conducted via a semi-structured questionnaire. The elicited data was analyzed with SPSS 27. The population in this study were personal assistants (PAs) to HoDs. 20 personal assistants (PAs) to HoDs from two different universities in Faisalabad, Pakistan, i.e., the University of Agriculture Faisalabad and Government College University Faisalabad (10 from each university) were chosen for this research study's sample. The data has been presented graphically using the percentage approach. Additionally, the data has been evaluated. Results based on the data have been presented, and at the end, conclusions have been drawn and recommendations for the management of the university and the designers of ESP courses have also been emphasized.

DATA ANALYSIS

The analysis of the data elicited with semi-structured questionnaire has been presented in the following charts and an interpretation of them is also provided in the following section:
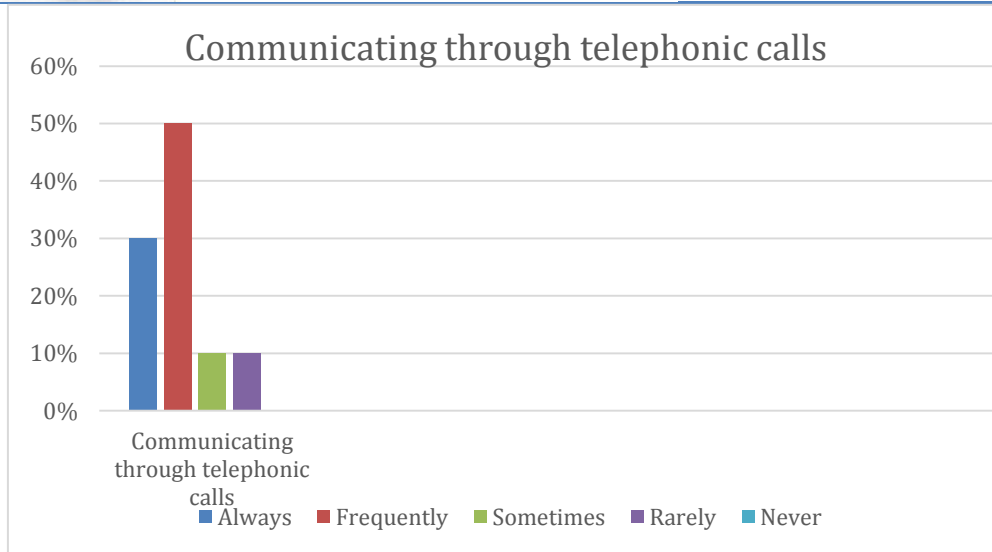
Chart 1.1: *Communicating through telephonic calls*

Chart 1.1 illustrates that 50% of the respondents' answer was that they have to communicate through telephonic calls. An applied linguist might well deduce that most of the respondents need listening and speaking skills relevant to their particular field of profession.

Chart 1.2: Writing Emails

Chart 1.2 illustrates that 60% of the respondents' believe that they are frequently required to write and read email while the other 30% of the respondents believe that they have always to write and read emails. So, this questions goes to show that writing email is a necessary skills required by the personal assistants of HoDs of various departments which needs necessary reading and writing skills.
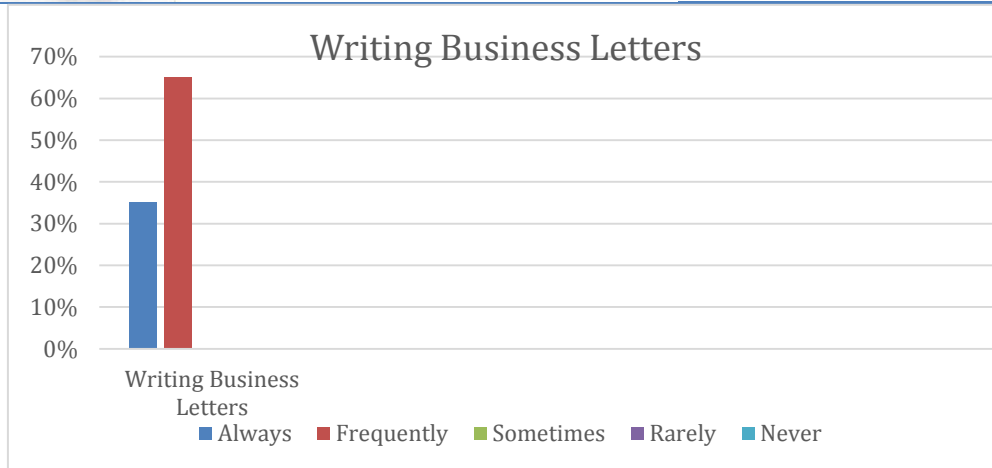
Chart 1.3: *Writing Business Letters*

In contrast to 35% of respondents who said they always interact through business letters, 65% of respondents said they frequently write business letters. This is shown in Chart 1.3. None of the respondents said they never, very infrequently, or very occasionally write business letters.

Chart 1.4: *Writing Minutes of Meeting*

Chart 1.4 shows that 35% of people always write minutes of meetings, 30% write them frequently, 25% write them sometimes, 10% write them rarely, and 10% never write them. This suggests that most people write minutes of meetings at least sometimes, but there is a significant minority who never do so. It is also worth noting that the percentage of people who write minutes of meetings always is higher than the percentage who write them frequently.
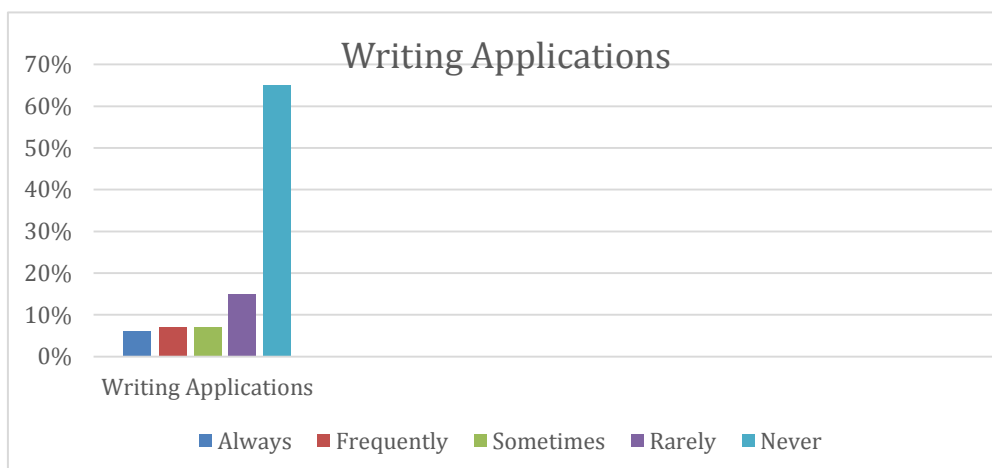
Chart 1.5: *Writing Applications*

Chart 1.5 shows that 40% of people always write applications, 30% use them frequently, 20% use them sometimes, 10% use them rarely, and 10% never use them. This suggests that most of the respondents write applications at least sometimes, but there is a significant minority who never do so. It is also worth noting that the percentage of people who write applications always is lower than the percentage who write them frequently. This suggests that there are some people who are very reliant on writing applications, while others are less so.
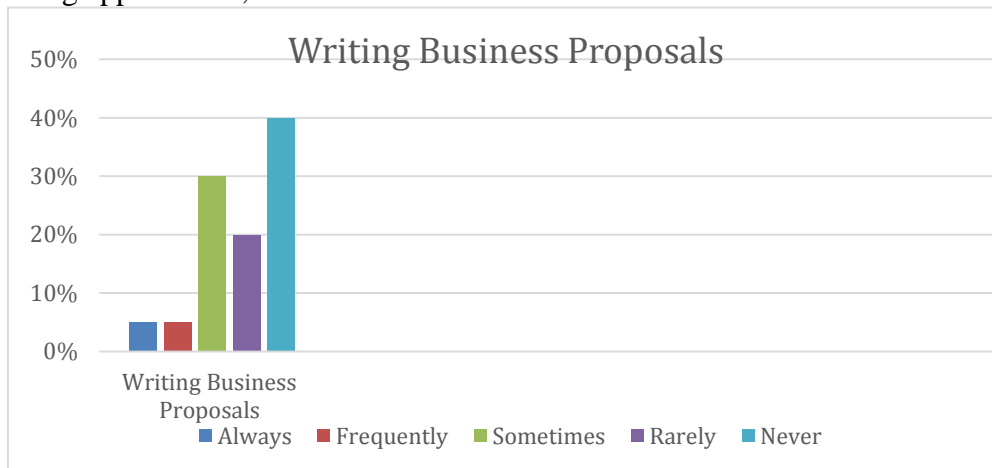

Chart 1.6: *Writing Business Proposals*

Chart 1.6 shows that 40% of respondents never write business proposals, 30% sometimes do so while 20% rarely write business proposals, 5% each do so for always and frequently. This data suggests that most respondents wether 'never' or 'rarely' write business proposals while there is a marginal percentage of the reposents who sometimes, frequently and always do so.
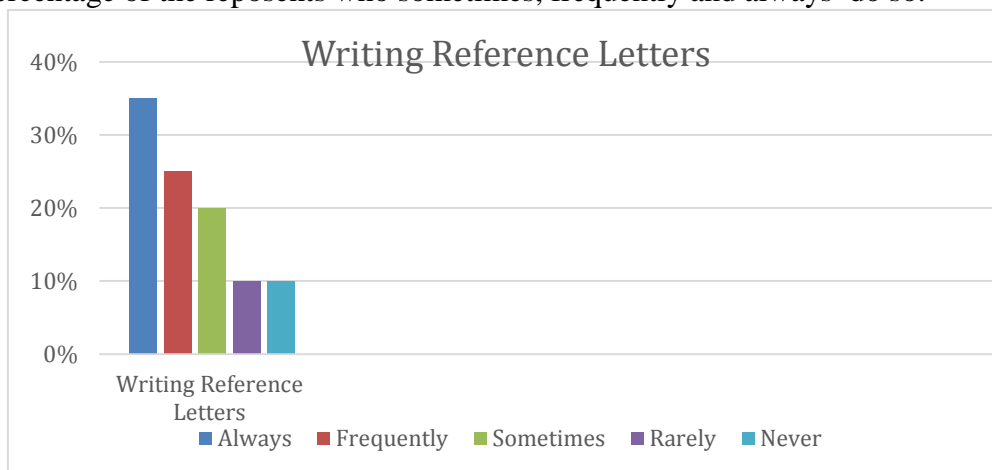

Chart 1.7: *Writing Business Proposals*

The most common answer is "always" (35%), followed by "frequently" (25%). 20% of PAs say that they "sometimes" write reference letters, and 10% each say they "never" or "rarely" do so. Overall, the chart shows that a majority of PAs (80%) to HoDs of different departments in universities write reference letters at least sometimes. The most common reason for writing reference letters is to help students or colleagues apply for jobs or scholarships.
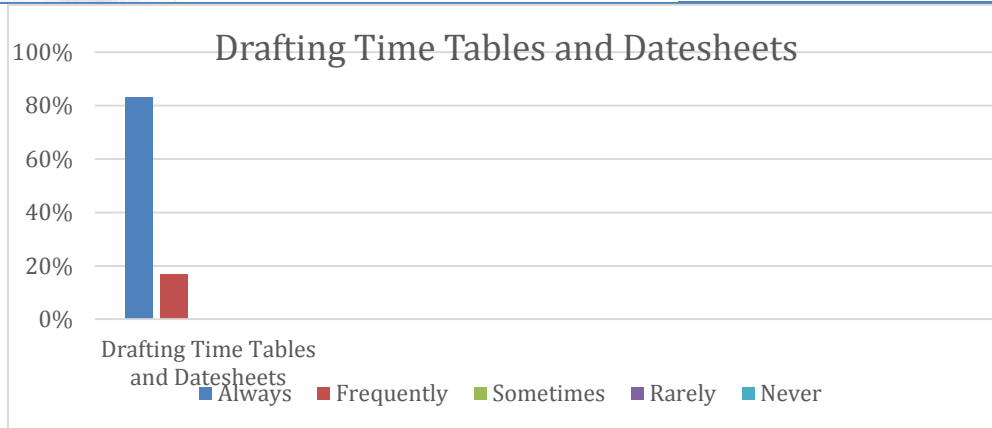
Chart 1.8: *Drafting timetables and datesheets*

According to the data elicited for question no. 8 as illusterated in Chart 1.8 drafting timetables and datesheets is the most common of the responsibilities opf PAs to HoDs of different departments at universities. The data shows that the PAs must have the knowledge of the softwares for drafting timetables and datesheets and similarly they should also have the English language skills to instruct the software for performing the task of drafting timetables and datesheets.

Chart 1.9: *Dreading and Writing Contracts*

The most common answer is "always" (65%), followed by "frequently" (20%). 10% of respondents say they "sometimes" read and write contracts, and 5% say they "never" do so. Overall, the chart shows that a majority of respondents who are PAs to HoDs of different departments in universities have to read and write contracts at least sometimes. The most common reason for reading and writing contracts is to ensure that the university is legally protected. Variability in the percentage of respondents engaged in contract-related work across departments may be attributed to factors such as the department's nature of work, size, and the experience of the PAs. These findings provide insights into the role of PAs in managing contracts within the university setting.
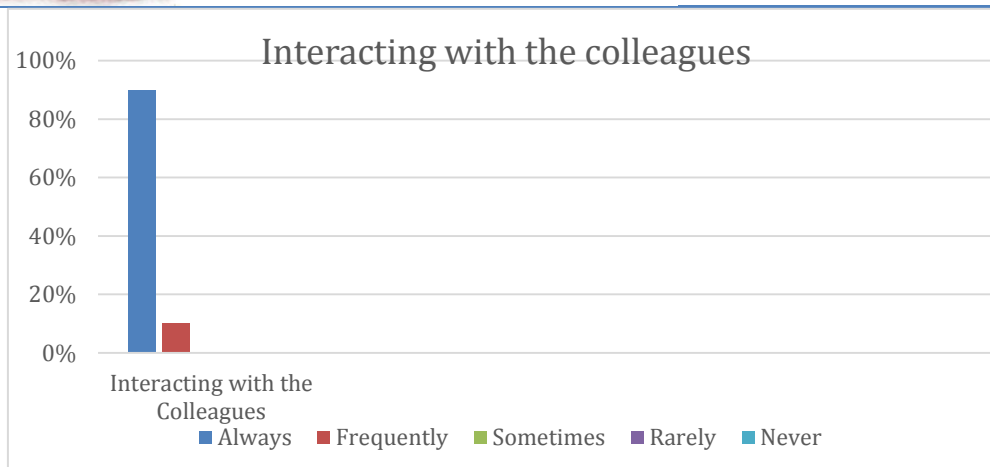
Chart 1.10: *Interacting with the colleagues*

The most common answer is "always" (90%), followed by "frequently" (10%). 0% of PAs say they "sometimes" interact with their colleagues, and 0% say they "never" do so. This means that all of the PAs to HoDs in this survey interact with their colleagues at least sometimes. The most common reason for interacting with colleagues is to collaborate on projects or tasks. The high percentage of PAs to HoDs who interact with their colleagues suggests that these professionals value teamwork and collaboration. This is important, as PAs to HoDs often play a vital role in supporting the work of their departments.

The last question in the questionnaire was an open-ended question. The respondents were given five empty lines to write their answers for specific English language skills used by them to conduct their routine official responsibilities. According to 30% of the respondents, writing skills and grammar were used by them, whereas 30% of them also said that report writing was the major English language skill used by them. According to 20% of the respondents, speaking English and fluency in the English language are used by them, whereas 10% of the respondents expressed that they use reading and listening skills most of the time in order to conduct their official responsibilities.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

After an analysis of data, the research study reveals that there is a need for designing and teaching an English for specific purpose course for the personal assistants.

Developing listening and speaking skills is crucial for the successful completion of the responsibilities assigned to the PAs. Furthermore, there is a potential role for ESP practitioners in PAs to improve their language proficiency for professional communication. Email communication is a crucial aspect of the job for personal assistants of HoDs in various university departments. It underscores the importance of both reading and writing skills in effectively carrying out their responsibilities, highlighting the significance of these skills in their professional roles. Business letter writing is a prevalent and regular practice. There is a strong presence of both frequent and constant engagement with business letters, indicating their significance in the communication and professional activities of the respondents. Similarly, writing minutes of meetings is a common practice, with the majority of respondents engaging in this activity at least occasionally. However, a significant minority chooses not to write minutes, and a notable portion of those who do place a high emphasis on doing so consistently ("always"). This information provides insights into the varying approaches to meeting documentation among the surveyed individuals. Additionally, the level of

reliance on writing applications varies, with some individuals relying heavily on them (frequent use) and others using them less consistently. These findings provide insights into the diverse writing habits and preferences within the surveyed population. Likewise, business proposal writing is not a common task among the surveyed population, with a significant majority either never or rarely writing business proposals. There is a minority of respondents who do engage in this activity, but their numbers are relatively small compared to those who do not. Moreover, the majority of PAs to HoDs in universities are involved in writing reference letters to varying degrees. While "always" and "frequently" are the most common responses, there is also a segment that does so less often or not at all. The primary motivation for writing reference letters is to aid students or colleagues in their job or scholarship applications, underscoring the supportive role played by these individuals in the academic and professional advancement of others. Likewise, drafting timetables and datesheets is a primary responsibility of PAs in university departments. To fulfill this role effectively, PAs need both software proficiency and English language skills. This information provides insights into the specific skill set and responsibilities required in this particular professional context. One more interesting finding of this study is that the PAs to HoDs in this survey highly value teamwork and collaboration. All of the respondents interact with colleagues at least sometimes, and they do so for various purposes, including project collaboration and relationship building. These findings underscore the importance of interpersonal skills and teamwork in the role of PAs to HoDs and suggest that they are actively engaged in supporting their departments' work through effective collaboration with colleagues. Last but not least, writing skills, grammar, report writing, speaking, fluency, reading, and listening all play important roles, depending on the nature of their specific job tasks. These findings underscore the multifaceted language demands faced by individuals in their professional roles, reflecting the importance of English language proficiency in various aspects of their work.

The following suggestions should be implemented to improve the English for specific purpose for the personal assistants (PAs) to HoDs of different departments in the universities of Pakistan. To begin with, the university administration should take into consideration providing ESP courses to assist PAs in improving their communication skills, particularly speaking and listening. Moreover, it should organize the ESP training courses for PAs, focusing on developing skills like writing emails, drafting business proposals, or improving fluency in professional communication. Similarly, recognizing the value of email communication in contemporary workplaces, the university administration should launch ESP training to help PAs hone their writing and reading abilities for emails, placing an emphasis on clarity, professionalism, and efficient communication. Because writing business letters is so common for PAs in universities, the administration should offer seminars on how to do it well. This can assist people in maintaining their written correspondence's professionalism and clarity. Likewise, given the importance placed on teamwork and interactions between coworkers, the university administration should promote and support a collaborative work environment and encourage programs that improve communication and cooperation among team members to boost departmental effectiveness. Lastly, the university management needs to be aware of the many linguistic requirements that professionals must meet to perform their jobs. Depending on the nature of the job tasks, they should think about offering resources or training courses that address particular English language abilities.

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APPENDICES
Questionnaire

Topic of Research:
A Needs Analysis of English for Specific Purpose for the Personal Assistants (PAs) to HoDs of Various University Departments

No.	Activity/Task	Always	Frequently	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
1	Communicating through telephonic calls					
2	Writing Emails					
3	Writing business letters					
4	Writing minutes of meeting					
5	Writing application					
6	Writing business					

	proposals					
7	Writing Reference letters					
8	Drafting Time Tables and date-sheets					
9	Reading and Writing Contracts					
10	Interacting with the colleagues					

11. Please enlist the specific English Language skills used by you to conduct you routing official responsibilities:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____