LIBERAL JOURNAL OF LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE REVIEW
An International Double-Blind Peer-Reviewed Open Access Journal
ISSN (Online): 3006-3175 | ISSN (Print): 3006-3167
Volume 5, Issue 7 September, 2026

BRIDGING THE GULF: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF ESP CURRICULUM ALIGNMENT WITH WORKPLACE COMMUNICATION NEEDS IN PAKISTANI ENGINEERING AND BUSINESS SECTORS

Dr. Abrar Ajmal[*1], Ms. Yasmeen Khatoon[2]

[*1]*Professor, English Language Center, Minhaj University, Lahore, Pakistan*
[2]*Lecturer, English Language Center, Minhaj University, Lahore, Pakistan*

[*1]abrar.ajmal@mul.edu.pk, [2]yasmeenkhatoon.eng@mul.edu.pk

DOI: https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.22910454

Keywords
English for Specific Purpose (ESP), Pakistan workplace communication, Intercultural communicative competence (ICC)

Article History
Received: 01 June 2026
Accepted: 23 August 2026
Published: 22 September 2026

Copyright @Author
Corresponding Author: *
Dr. Abrar Ajmal

Abstract

This research project is a critical examination of the congruence between English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses taught in Pakistani institutions of higher learning and the communicative skills that predominate in engineering and business workplaces. Even though English is a hindrance to economic mobility, existing empirical evidence indicates that systemic shortcomings in ESP provision continue to create skills gaps. This qualitative research was based on semi-structured interviews with 72 participants who represent four categories of stakeholder students, graduates, professionals, and instructors in major urban centres, as well as a critical discourse analysis of curricular documents and workplace texts.

Findings show that there is a multi-layered type of detachment where: (1) there is still dominance of decontextualized, accuracy based pedagogies as opposed to fluency, based strategic communicative competence required in professional interactions; (2) there is neglect of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) in the curriculum; (3) there is no systematic teaching of local relevant workplace texts; and (4) there is enforcement of social-educational inequalities where curricula favours graduates with elite English achievement.

It proposes a participatory, progressive model of ESP reform, grounded in critical ESP, equity-oriented pedagogy, and authentic problem-based learning, comprising three stages and an institutionalised Teacher-Industry-Academic Collaborative process.

1.INTRODUCTION

In Pakistan's complex sociolinguistic landscape, English is placed in an existential contradiction. It is at times a symbol of the colonial past, of some social and economic elites, and an invaluable practical instrument for opening markets worldwide, for modern technology, and for postsecondary education (Rahman, 2020; Shamim, 2021). To the young Pakistani generation, where the percentage of young people (under 30) is more than 64 percent, professional English proficiency is no longer a luxury but a compulsion to achieve meaningful work experience in the industries that are being advanced using national development agenda vehicles, such as: Digital -Pakistan, and the Strategic Trade Policy Framework (Government of Pakistan, 2022). In this stakes-based situation, university teaching/learning English as a specific purpose (ESP) programme ends up with a significant task and role to undertake, in

LIBERAL JOURNAL OF LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE REVIEW
An International Double-Blind Peer-Reviewed Open Access Journal
ISSN (Online): 3006-3175 | ISSN (Print): 3006-3167
Volume 5, Issue 7 September, 2026

preparing engineering/business graduates - who are supposed to be the engine of economic modernisation - with the specialised communicative competence required to survive in the local and global professional environment.

However, there is a pervasive sense of failure in this mission. Coherent and vocalised feedback of industries and corporate bodies suggests that there is a wide gap in skills of communicating with any sensitive matters, where employers complain that fresh graduates have no basic operational competencies in the English language, such as how to write a concise technical mail, participate constructively in an online meeting, or negotiate complicated issues in English with foreign clients as the principal constraining variables in productivity and development (World Bank, 2022; Pakistan Business council, 2023). Even a considerable investment in English-language education in institutions of higher learning and a well-established market in the private tuition still does not satisfy the employers, a sign of a structural pathology on the systemic level, a veritable disjunction between what is taught in the ESP classrooms, and what is practised and demanded in Pakistani workplaces.

The present study aims to achieve a proper diagnosis of this pathology. The formulated research question is as follows: To what extent, and in what specific ways, do the current ESP curricula in Pakistani universities serving engineering and business students address the actual communicative requirements and practices of the corresponding professional domains? To address this, the study will be methodologically and analytically informed by Juan's (2015) full-scale doctoral study in Taiwan. This environment is similar to Pakistan's in its stance on English as a foreign language (EFL) and its high economic stakes. However, it contrasts with the details of post-colonial linguistic hierarchies and the extreme issues of equity. Adopting a strict, multi-stakeholder approach to the Pakistani situation, this research enables one to delve into the depth of the contextual analysis while also offering a convenient cross-Asian comparative perspective.

This question has three folds of meaning. First, it is bridging the empirical gap. Fine, workplace-based studies of ESP are absent, although there are many macro-sociolinguistic studies of the English language in Pakistan (e.g., Rahman, 2020; Mansoor, 2021), and even more general studies of the English-language teaching (ELT) practises (e.g., Shamim and Allen, 2020). All published studies have not systematically mapped the genres, tasks, and competencies of English used in Pakistani engineering and business settings, nor have they critically evaluated the existing provision of ESP against this map. Second, the study engages with the controversies in the field of educational equity in a timely manner. It also examines how ESP programmes that are commonly considered as linguistically neutral means of developing skills may actually come to mediate and increase already existing disparities based on the prior linguistic and educational capital of students (Bourdieu, 1991), in this case, the schooling experience of either English-based, Urdu-based, or vernacular-based schools. Third, the policy and pedagogical implications for the country struggling with youth unemployment and high economic targets contingent on the expertise of the global communicative labour force are direct outcomes.

2 Literature Review

2.1 The Evolution of ESP: From Needs Analysis to Critical Praxis

The field of ESP has evolved from a more practical, early orientation toward teaching the language, in which instructions were tailored to learners' particular goals (Strevens, 1988), to more intricate theoretical and methodological orientations. Needs Analysis (NA) was identified by Hutchinson and Waters (1987) as the basis for curriculum design, elaborated by Long (2005), and proposes a rigorous, multi-method, and stakeholder-inclusive NA. The existing ESP scholarship may be characterised as a combination of multiple strands that are crucial and can be immediately implemented in the current study.

Theorised by Swales (1990, 2019) and Bhatia (1993, 2017), Genre Theory and Pedagogy has been a radical departure, shifting the focus from individual forms of language to the processes of socially recognised

LIBERAL JOURNAL OF LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE REVIEW
LJLLR
An International Double-Blind Peer-Reviewed Open Access Journal
ISSN (Online): 3006-3175 | ISSN (Print): 3006-3167
Volume 5, Issue 7 September, 2026

communicative events. Genre-based teaching aids in the explicit teaching of rhetorical frames, linguistic forms, and social intent of workplace and academic writing. Students should be able to participate in disciplinary discourses, as Hyland (2018) indicates that genre mastery is the most important aspect of professional acculturation and success.

Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) has gained increasing significance with the worldwide establishment of English as a lingua franca. The contemporary ESP is premised on the maturation of Byram's (1997, 2021) model, according to which any professional communication cannot just be linguistically possible. However, this communication also entails the presence of savours of knowledge, skills, and attitudes, including intercultural sensitivity, mediation, and negotiation of meaning (Baker, 2022). It is particularly necessary in post-colonial contexts, such as Pakistan, where professionals must simultaneously confront the inner circle and the outer/expanding circle Englishes (Kachru, 1992) without losing their local professional identities.

Critical ESP and equity are new lines of literature that challenge the perceived neutrality of ESP. Benesch (2001) and Chun (2019) state that the pedagogy that encourages students to critically analyse and question the discourses and ideologies of the preferred disciplines and workplaces should be encouraged. This, among others, includes how language needs may marginalise members of minority groups and the suggestion of pedagogies that recognise multilingual repertoires and multiple forms of communication (Canagararajah, 2013; Pennycook, 2021).

2.2 ESP in Asian Contexts: Commonalities and Specificities

The Specific Purposes (ESP) scholarship, Regional English, identifies a set of issues that appear in many Asian pedagogical systems. The largest and most significant of them are massive enrolments, culture-exam-based, teacher-centred, and reliance on imported textbooks that do not always have the cultural fit (Li & Hu, 2021; Huang & Zhang, 2022). One of the most topical references is a particular case study performed by Juan (2015). The break she discovers is that the current emphasis on grammar instruction that characterises most Taiwanese ESP classrooms is inappropriate for intricate, integrated communicative exercises, such as team-based problem-solving and intercultural negotiation, which are actually the activities required in engineering and business settings. The three-phase curriculum model presented by Juan, in which English as an Academic Purpose (EAP) is the initial phase, followed by authentic problem-based learning, and, lastly, workplace integration, is a well-constructed structural model worth a second glance.

However, certain compounding forces in the Pakistani context necessitate contextualising such models. The first is the diglossic reality/equity imperative: unlike in Taiwan, where Mandarin Chinese is undoubtedly the elite, high-prestige language, in Pakistan, hard English-Urdu bilingualism is the norm, with English as the only language of power in elite spheres (Coleman, 2017). This generates an acute English divide because, since the onset of early schooling, ESP at the university level does not commence with a homogenous group of students. However, it must contend with heterogeneous levels of linguistic capital. Next, the issue of equity arises (Manan, David, and Dumanig, 2023).

Secondly, there is the notion of so-called glocal professional needs: Pakistani professionals have to work in a dual communicative space as on the one hand, they are compelled to communicate with international partners, on the other hand, they have to work in South Asian and Middle Eastern regional networks, where there are significant differences in the communication styles, genres, and types of English (Mahboob, 2022). This needs a multi-purpose, tactic-based communicative repertoire, a dimension that most current ESP curricula lack adequately.

Third, institutional and resource constraints: Pakistani state universities are severely constrained, with low-qualified and overworked personnel, a lack of authentic sources, and no connection to industry (HEC

LIBERAL JOURNAL OF LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE REVIEW
An International Double-Blind Peer-Reviewed Open Access Journal
ISSN (Online): 3006-3175 | ISSN (Print): 3006-3167
Volume 5, Issue 7 September, 2026

Quality Assurance Agency, 2022). These realities demand realistic, scaled-up reform strategies that can be implemented in the limiting environments that define most institutions of higher learning in the region.

2.3 The Pakistani ESP Research Landscape: A Scoping Review

A methodical search of large databases (2018-23) in Scopus, Web of Science, and ERIC on the subjects of English for Specific Purposes and Pakistan yielded fewer than 15 pertinent works. The literature available is split into three primary themes: needs analysis of specific academic disciplines, such as that of computer science (Khan & Khan, 2020), or nursing (Youseuf & Ghani, 2021); the attitudinal survey among students and teachers (Ali & Javed, 2022); and a review of textbook suitability (Rasheed & Fareed, 2021). Both provide some helpful information but remain confined to a single institution, rely solely on questionnaire results, and disregard systematic workplace ethnography. Above all, they lack a critical equity lens and develop a holistic, empirically grounded system for curriculum reform. This study, therefore, aims to bridge this multipolar gap.

3 Methodology

3.1 Research Design and Philosophical Underpinnings

The proposed investigation is based on a critical qualitative framework (Creswell and Poth, 2018) that uses a multiple-case study design (Yin, 2018), all within a participatory paradigm. The study, grounded in a critical realist ontology, recognizes that dominant power relations, such as linguistic imperialism and class structures, constitute external social reality. However, it also acknowledges that we mediate our knowledge of reality through discourse and personal experience. In this regard, the methodology was designed to give voice to traditionally marginalized stakeholders, including Urdu-medium students and early-career professionals, and to shed light on how the use of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) can perpetuate social inequity.

3.2 Participant Recruitment and Sampling Strategy

A convenient, maximum-variation sampling plan was used to obtain experiences across major variables: geographic location, type of university (public/private; elite/non-elite), professional sector, and prior linguistic/educational background. Data saturation was desired and achieved. The last sample included 72 participants recruited from four stakeholder groups between June and November 2023.

Table 1 Participant Demographics by Stakeholder Group

Stakeholder Group	*n*	Sector or Academic Background	Prior Medium of Instruction
ESP Students	24	Engineering (12), Business (12)	EMI (50%), UMI (50%)
Recent Graduates	24	Engineering- and business-related professional roles	EMI (50%), UMI (50%)
Industry Professionals	16	Information Technology, Telecommunications, Textiles, Banking	Not applicable
ESP Instructors	8	Four public and private universities	Not applicable

Note. *n* = number of participants. EMI = English-medium institution; UMI = Urdu or vernacular-medium institution. "Not applicable" indicates that the prior medium of instruction was not relevant for that stakeholder group.

LIBERAL JOURNAL OF LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE REVIEW
An International Double-Blind Peer-Reviewed Open Access Journal
ISSN (Online): 3006-3175 | ISSN (Print): 3006-3167
Volume 5, Issue 7 September, 2026

ESP students were final-year undergraduates from four universities representing different tiers: National University of Sciences and Technology (Islamabad public elite), University of the Punjab (Lahore large public), Lahore University of Management Sciences (Lahore private elite), and University of Peshawar (public, regional). Recent graduates (1-3 years post-graduation) were employed in relevant sectors and recruited via professional networks. Industry professionals were mid- to senior-level managers from companies in key economic sectors. ESP instructors represented a range of experience levels and academic qualifications.

3.3 Data Collection Procedures and Instruments

A triangulated approach ensured depth and validity through multiple data sources.

Semi-structured interviews served as the primary instrument, conducted individually (60-120 minutes each). Protocols were adapted from Juan (2015) but significantly expanded. For professionals and graduates, interviews focused on daily communicative routines, critical incidents of communication success/failure, analysis of workplace texts, perceptions of graduate preparedness, and specific competency gaps. For students, protocols explored learning histories, current ESP experiences, perceptions of curriculum relevance, skill self-assessments, and career anxieties. Instructor interviews probed pedagogical beliefs, curriculum design processes, challenges faced (resources, student diversity, institutional support), and perceptions of industry needs.

Interviews were conducted in participants' preferred language (English, Urdu, or mixed), audio-recorded with consent, and transcribed verbatim. Urdu transcripts were translated into English by bilingual researchers with back-translation checks for accuracy.

Document and artifact analysis included: (1) Curricular documents (syllabi, course outlines, lesson plans, assessment tasks) from 12 ESP courses across four universities, analyzed using content analysis; (2) Textbook analysis of the two most commonly used textbooks identified from instructor interviews; (3) Workplace text corpus of approximately 150 anonymized real examples (emails, reports, meeting minutes, presentation slides) shared by professionals for genre analysis.

Participatory feedback workshops were conducted as member-checking exercises. Preliminary findings from professional and graduate interviews were presented in two half-day workshops (Karachi and Lahore) to a subset of participants (n=20) for validation, refinement, and collaborative solution ideation.

3.4 Data Analysis Framework

Multi-iterative analytical processing was conducted using NVivo 14.

Phase 1: Interpretive Analysis of Interview Data.

The thematic analysis followed the six-step model of Braun and Clarke (2022). After the familiarization process (conducted iteratively and including repeated readings of the transcripts), the researcher produced preliminary descriptive codes, including fear of speaking, email-writing challenges, and the use of Pakistani idioms. A deductive inductive hybrid approach led to the development of the themes; deductively the analysis tried to find evidence that would fit the taxonomy developed by Juan (2015) (Routine Tasks, Team oriented Problem Solving, Negotiation, Soft Skills, ICC), and inductively allowing emergent themes specific to the Pakistani situation, such as Equity and Linguistic Capital and Glocal Communication Strategies. Themes concerning power relations and the structuring ideology were interrogated through Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) perspectives informed by Fairclough's (2013) theory.

LIBERAL JOURNAL OF LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE REVIEW
An International Double-Blind Peer-Reviewed Open Access Journal
ISSN (Online): 3006-3175 | ISSN (Print): 3006-3167
Volume 5, Issue 7 September, 2026

Phase 2: Genre Analysis of Workplace Corpus.
The analysis of genres was conducted within the framework proposed by Bhatia (2017). The study conducted a purposive sample of workplace texts to determine: (1) Move structures- stages of rhetoric used; (2) Recurring lexical grammatical patterns; and (3) Contextual variables- social purpose, intended audience, and media of communication.

Phase 3: Critical Content Analysis of Curricular Documents.
The curricular materials were coded in terms of: (1) Explicit versus implicit curriculum statements of what is intended to be learned and what is actually emphasized; (2) Pedagogical orientation, evaluating the approaches used in teaching based on transmission and constructivism; (3) Equity, evaluating whether the curricular materials are inclusive and accommodating of various student needs.

Phase 4: Integration and Interpretation.
Results from all analytical steps were combined into coherent, evidence-based accounts. The divergences in stakeholders' perceptions were identified as salient findings, and an equity lens was consistently used to explain the varied experiences in the ESP domain, thereby contributing to the understanding of the ESP gap.

3.5 Ethical Considerations and Researcher Positionality
The Institutional Review Board granted ethical approval in accordance with the institutional requirements. The informed consent process emphasized voluntary participation, complete confidentiality, and the right to discontinue at any time. Identifiers that were anonymised completely. The team of researchers does not deny their own positionality: the Principal Investigator is a Pakistani applied linguist who has been trained both locally and within the Western academic environment and is fully conscious of the privileges of high English proficiency. This insider-outsider position increased rapport but necessitated continual reflexive self-doubt—the democratisation of the interpretive process involved participatory aspects (such as member-checking workshops).

4 Findings: Unpacking the Pedagogical-Professional Gulf
It is not only that the empirical evidence points to a thin slice; it actually reveals a deep, multidimensional gap between the ESP teaching environment and the corresponding professional environment in Pakistan, defined by four major thematic discordances.

4.1 Disjunction 1: Pedagogy of Accuracy versus Practice of Strategic Fluency
The most striking discrepancy is the pedagogical approach that is based on ESP classes. A Grammar-Translation (GT) paradigm, combined with a Structural Syllabus, reigns in such courses, according to data from 92 percent of students and an extremely careful analysis of syllabuses. Teaching is thus greatly concerned with decontextualized grammar rules, memorisation of lists of technical vocabulary, and translation of isolated sentences.
An interview with an engineering student at the University of the Punjab can concisely illustrate the following modality: Sir writes 10 sentences on the board about the forces acting on a beam. We translate them into Urdu, and he corrects our grammar. We do not talk about how to explain a beam failure to a client who is not an engineer, as I do every week in my job. This example demonstrates the instructive priorities that overshadow real communicative practice.
The use of assessment practices also reinforces grammatical accuracy. In the sample under evaluation, 85 percent of course examinations were multiple-choice grammar tests, sentence-correction exercises, and short translation problems. The logic behind this strategy was explained by a business instructor at a state

LIBERAL JOURNAL OF LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE REVIEW
An International Double-Blind Peer-Reviewed Open Access Journal
ISSN (Online): 3006-3175 | ISSN (Print): 3006-3167
Volume 5, Issue 7 September, 2026

university: "In a classroom of 70 students, how would I evaluate speaking or real writing?" With a grammar test at least, I can give a mark which, even though the test is objective, is quicker to mark. The teacher quoted in the statement focuses on the perceived effectiveness and objectivity of objective assessment methods, at the expense of communicative competence.

In sharp contrast, professionals in the workplace report an overwhelming need for strategic fluency and pragmatic competence, often prioritizing getting the job done over grammatical proficiency. One software project manager in Karachi said, "I do not care whether my developer says we are facing a problem or an issue." I am interested in his ability to clearly explain the problem, what happened, and what he is doing to correct it during our daily Zoom call with the Polish staff. All that matters is clarity and speed. This empirical data shows that corporate communication situations require a flexible, context-sensitive, and expedient linguistic approach.

These findings are supported by corpus analysis of workplace texts. It discloses the prevalent use of elliptical forms, colloquial language, and tolerance of minor grammatical errors when the communicative purpose is effectively achieved, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2 Accuracy vs. Fluency Features in Workplace Corpus

Feature Type	Classroom Emphasis	Workplace Practice	Example from Corpus
Grammatical Precision	High priority, corrected	Lower priority, tolerated	"The team completed the task yesterday."
Vocabulary	Technical, formal	Mixed technical/colloquial	"bug" instead of "system error"
Sentence Structure	Complete, complex	Often elliptical, fragments	"Meeting moved to 3. Please confirm."
Error Treatment	Corrected immediately	Ignored if the meaning is clear	"The data is shown..."

The Equity Dimension: The current focus on accuracy is disproportionately harsh on students with a UM background. Their insecurity in language, often rooted in years of negative feedback, is further strengthened in ESP situations. A UM graduate who studied textiles recently said, "At university, I was so frightened of committing an error that I never spoke." I can now see my EMI colleagues make 'mistakes' in emails, but they write with confidence and still get responses. I still have to unlearn that fear.

4.2 Disjunction

2: The Curricular Invisibility of Intercultural Communicative Competence

Although Intercultural Communication Competence (ICC) has emerged as the most significant prerequisite for success in the modern professional interview process, it is conspicuously underrepresented in formal academic programs. While describing the complex intercultural dynamics that span global and regional interfaces, practitioners often do so.

The example of a business development manager in the Information Technology industry, describing one of the costs of such shortcomings, helped highlight a major intercultural misunderstanding: our engineer, on a video call, kept saying 'yes' while listening, and the Swedish side took this as a sign of agreement. He was only being polite and following. We had no idea that in their world, silence is translated as 'I am listening,' yes, as I commit. No one taught us this." He was just being polite, which meant he was being attentive, but the Swedish counterpart interpreted his repeated affirmations as a commitment. There is a

LIBERAL JOURNAL OF LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE REVIEW
An International Double-Blind Peer-Reviewed Open Access Journal
ISSN (Online): 3006-3175 | ISSN (Print): 3006-3167
Volume 5, Issue 7 September, 2026

significant gap between professional expectations and culturally based communication practices, as highlighted by the manager's account.

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) syllabi have a glaring gap: the module titles or learning outcomes are not clearly defined in terms of intercultural communication. Even on Western business etiquette, such as handshakes, punctuality, etc., standard textbooks, mostly published in the United Kingdom and the United States, contain only slight cultural comment. However, they do not mention South-South interactions or Pakistan's subtle professional culture. This curricular negligence puts new graduates in a poor position to survive in the reality of globalized and culturally specific Pakistan.

4.3 Disjunction 3:
Generic Dialogues versus Local Genre Mastery

Degree programmes still rely on simplified, generic conversations drawn from international textbooks, often covering topics such as reserving a hotel room, ordering at a restaurant, or making small talk at a global conference.

According to a construction management graduate, the lack of connection was noticed: "I have never needed to book a hotel room to work. However, I must provide a weekly report on the sites' progress to the client and consultant in a very specific format. I never managed to develop this skill unless I simulated what my supervisor had left behind, and I received reprimands throughout the first three months. How come I was not taught this format in university?

A genre analysis of the Workplace Text Corpus shows that high-stakes, locally salient genres are present but not taught in current curricula, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Locally Salient Workplace Genres Missing from ESP Curricula

Genre Type	Professional Context	Key Features Missing in Instruction
PEC-Standard Project Reports	Engineering, mandatory format	Specific sections, formal register
B2B Negotiation Emails	South Asian business context	Elaborate politeness, indirectness
Internal "Note Sheets"	Corporate/government briefing	Concise distillation, actionable points
Client Progress Updates	Service industries	Balancing technical and lay explanations

This lack of explicit genre training forces graduates to undergo a lengthy, trial-and-error education process in the high-stakes silos of professional settings, thereby disadvantaging those without access to mentoring or model tools.

4.4 Disjunction
4 the Monolingual Classroom versus the Multilingual Workplace

Traditionally, ESP classrooms have been monolingual in English, with the use of Urdu suppressed or even considered inadequate. This position does not take into account the multilingual, translingual

LIBERAL JOURNAL OF LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE REVIEW
An International Double-Blind Peer-Reviewed Open Access Journal
ISSN (Online): 3006-3175 | ISSN (Print): 3006-3167
Volume 5, Issue 7 September, 2026

nature of the Pakistani professional context, in which practitioners regularly code-switch between English, Urdu, and local languages, depending on whom they are talking to and the context.

One of the senior engineers commented on this multilingual strategic approach: The most efficient managers here are those who can alternate. They write a perfect report in English to the headquarters, and, once addressing the foreman, use vibrant Punjabi to convey the same information to him so he can implement it accordingly. The courses we offer in ESP portray Urdu as an enemy, yet it is our greatest tool for getting things done on the ground.

By nullifying students' entire linguistic repertoire, contemporary ESP pedagogy not only creates artificial barriers but also fails to develop the strategic translanguaging competence for effective professional communication in Pakistan.

Overall, the net effect is a graduate who, despite being grammatically aware, is still communicatively incompetent; can handle technical sentences but not cross-cultural project calls; has been trained in artificial conversations but not in writing locally acceptable business proposals. The equity implications of this pedagogical mismatch are depressing: because students with English-medium instruction are moving across the gulf comparatively comfortably, those with Urdu-medium backgrounds are frequently left out, reinforcing already established socioeconomic inequalities.

5 Discussion:

Towards a Critical, Contextualized ESP Framework for Pakistan

It is a pedagogical mismatch at the systemic scale that emerges from our data, an incongruence that does not stop at inefficiency but subtly undermines the nation's economic aspirations and the quest for equitable education. This treatise, therefore, aims to go beyond mere diagnosis and to argue for a paradigm of transformation rooted in critical and context-sensitive principles.

5.1 Re-Envisioning the Foundation:

From Grammar-Translation to Genre-Aware, Strategic Competence

The persistence of the Grammatical-Translation approach is more a structural effect of large classes, under-resourced instructors, and an examination system that rewards discrete-point accuracy. The solution to the paradigm is to change the fundamental aim of language correctness to strategic communicative effectiveness.

This change can be operationalized through Genre-Based Pedagogy, modified for Pakistani workplaces. We would start the instruction with the analysis of the real local genres identified in our study rather than with the grammar rules. With the help of a teaching-learning cycle, students would: (1) dismantle model texts to make sense of their social purpose, audience, and move structure; (2) write similar texts together, under teacher guidance; (3) write their own texts independently, with feedback that does not focus on grammaticality. This practice clarifies the rules of communication at the workplace. It breaks down the genres of communication as the real gatekeepers to success in the professional world, providing all students, whether they had language capital before or not, with analytical tools through the process of decoding or writing professional texts.

5.2 Centering Intercultural Communicative Competence: A "Glocal" Imperative

Ignoring intercultural competence (ICC) in the curriculum is a fatal failure of imagination that treats English as a detached technical competence rather than as human interaction in all its complexities, including crossing cultural boundaries and power disparities. Based on the model of intercultural and transcultural communication by Byram (2021) and Baker (2022), ICC should be conceptualised as a cross-cutting theme rather than a single unit.

LIBERAL JOURNAL OF LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE REVIEW
LJLLR
An International Double-Blind Peer-Reviewed Open Access Journal
ISSN (Online): 3006-3175 | ISSN (Print): 3006-3167
Volume 5, Issue 7 September, 2026

A Pakistan-based ESP curriculum with ICC would comprise: (1) critical cultural analysis of the ways of communicating within Pakistani business culture, with regional partners, and with western counterparts, using case studies of cross-cultural misunderstandings; (2) building of so-called cultural savoir-faire by simulations on realistic situations; (3) use of Pakistani English as a valid, identity-marking variety in communicating with regional partners, whilst developing the ability of the students to make a so-called dialect-shift to more standardised forms where needed in the international arena. This strategy supports students' linguistic realities and provides strategic flexibility.

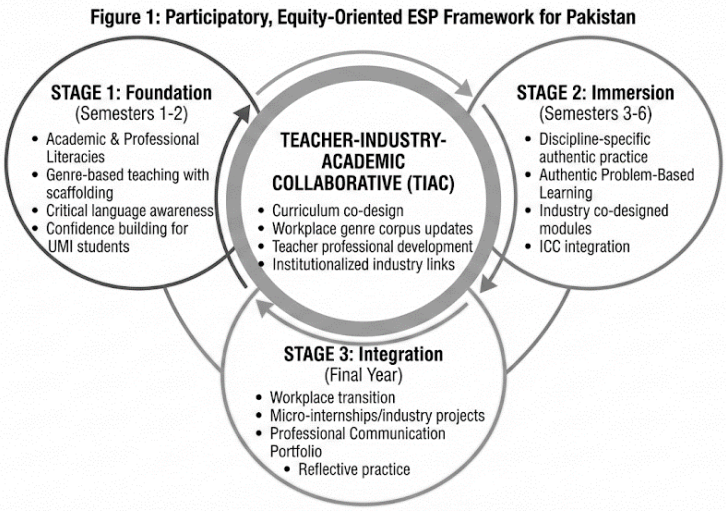
5.3 Embracing Translingualism: The Urdu-English Nexus as Professional Asset

The monolingual classroom policy is pedagogically unsound and sociolinguistically unsophisticated.
In line with the translingual turn in applied linguistics (Canagaraj, 2013; Pennycook, 2021), the Urdu-English bilingual repertoire should be recognized and incorporated as a key professional competency in the curriculum.
This includes: (1) Strategic code-switching training, learning how and when to switch; (2) Translation as a high-order skill, going beyond the sentence level of translation to translate practice; (3) Metalinguistic awareness, learning to reflect on language choices and power dynamics embedded in them.

5.4 A Proposed Participatory Framework for ESP Reform

Following the tripartite model of Juan (2015) and integrating the critical/contextual tenets mentioned above, we develop an ESP framework that is participatory, equity-based, and specific to Pakistan, as illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Participatory, Equity-Oriented ESP Framework for Pakistan



Stage 1: Scholarship in Academic and Professional Literacies (Semester 12) focuses on developing basic academic skills and confidence, especially among students whose medium of instruction is Urdu. The material includes high-frequency academic and workplace genres, as well as courses on critical language awareness. Pedagogically, it is a genre-based, high-scaffolding approach that uses low-stakes, fluency-focused speaking tasks and specifically allows students to discuss the strategic code-switching. The portfolios, writing assignments, and genre-oriented and reflective journal entries are instantiated as an assessment.
Stage 2: Embarkation into Discipline- and Authentic-Practice (Semesters 3–6) builds strategic competence in engineering and business communication through Authentic Problem-Based-Learning modules in

LIBERAL JOURNAL OF LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE REVIEW
LJLLR
An International Double-Blind Peer-Reviewed Open Access Journal
ISSN (Online): 3006-3175 | ISSN (Print): 3006-3167
Volume 5, Issue 7 September, 2026

collaboration with industry partners. These modules are based on local case studies, such as the one on preparing a Feasibility Report for a solar plant in Sindh. Pedagogy consists of collaborative work, simulation, and analytical work on practical workplace texts, such as express instruction in Inter-Cultural Communication based on comparative case studies. It is a performance-based assessment that involves simulated client meetings, a project proposal, and a presentation, with peer and self-assessment.

Stage 3: Workplace Integration and Critical Reflection (Final Year) helps students enter the professional practice field and develop a lifelong learning strategy. Its content requires micro-internships or live industry projects, reinforced by a journal of professional communication, known as a Professional Communication Portfolio, in which students record and reflect on their communicative experiences. Pedagogically, this level involves mentoring by academic and industry supervisors, as well as reflective practice conferences. The evaluation will include portfolio defense, supervisors, and final reflection papers about the growth of professional identity.

The Teacher-Industry-Academic Collaborative (TIAC) is a mechanism that will help sustain ESP implementation by breaking the isolation of ESP instructors. The permanent regional committees of ESP educators, subject specialists and industry professionals, which TIAC will comprise, will meet quarterly to: (1) review and refresh the corpus of local workplace genres; (2) co-design APBL modules and assessment tasks; (3) mentor industry and offer teacher professional development; and (4) institutionalise university-industry connections, and ensure that the curriculum is dynamic and responsive.

6 Conclusion

The paper presents strong empirical evidence supporting the long-held intuition that ESP instruction in Pakistan is not doing justice to its beneficiaries. The struggle is an outcome of predetermined pedagogical procedures, material wanting, and the absence of an acute, place-based exploration of sociolinguistic and professional landscapes. The effects are a loss of employability, financial waste in education, and the institutionalization of societal inequalities based on existing linguistic capital as the determinant of occupational promotion.

The paradigm outlined in this paper is not a trite piece of engineering work but an indicator of the paradigmatic shift in the conceptualization and application of ESP in Pakistan. It requires the translocation of ESP, no longer as a mechanism of discrimination according to already existing elite linguistic capital, but as a channel of good faith that conveys to each of us, students, the effectiveness of the multifaceted Pakistani professional practice, the strategic, genre-familiar, intercultural, and translingual repertoires of competencies.

It is not a simple task and it involves: (1) Political will by the Higher Education Commission to put equity in national directives on curriculum to the fore; (2) Investment in the professional development of teachers, both financially and institutionally, based on facilitative, genre-centric pedagogy rather than grammatical precision; (3) commitments by both universities and industry to make long-term partnerships through institutionalised forms (e.g. TIACs); (4) a restructuring of assessments to recognise communicative proficiency rather than grammatical.

The cost of inaction, however, is far greater than the cost of another generation of graduates who are not suited to the current economy, the further development of education systems that provide mobility but create exclusion, and the further burden on national aspirations for economic development. It is possible to rebuild the ESP ecosystem in Pakistan as one of equity, relevance, and empowerment, as the reform is grounded in the actual voices and needs of all stakeholders, particularly historically marginalized ones. The present study contributes to a context-specific model that can be used in a similar post-colonial, multilingual setting that must address the issue of sending graduates into globalized yet locally based professional environments.

LIBERAL JOURNAL OF LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE REVIEW
LJLLR
An International Double-Blind Peer-Reviewed Open Access Journal
ISSN (Online): 3006-3175 | ISSN (Print): 3006-3167
Volume 5, Issue 7 September, 2026

REFERENCES

Ali, S., & Javed, M. (2022). Attitudes of Pakistani university students towards English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses. Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies, 18(1), 234–249.

Baker, W. (2022). Intercultural and transcultural communication in the global world. Routledge.

Benesch, S. (2001). Critical English for academic purposes: Theory, politics, and practice. Lawrence Erlbaum.

Bhatia, V. K. (2017). Critical genre analysis: Investigating interdiscursive performance in professional practice. Routledge.

Bourdieu, P. (1991). Language and symbolic power. Harvard University Press.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2022). Thematic analysis: A practical guide. Sage.

Byram, M. (2021). Teaching and assessing intercultural communicative competence: Revisited (2nd Ed.). Multilingual Matters.

Canagarajah, S. (2013). Translingual practice: Global Englishes and cosmopolitan relations. Routledge.

Chun, C. W. (2019). Critical ELT in action: Foundations, promises, praxis. Routledge.

Coleman, H. (2017). Developing English in Pakistani education. In H. Coleman (Ed.), Multilingualisms and development (pp. 103–124). British Council.

Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches (4th Ed.). Sage.

Fairclough, N. (2013). Critical discourse analysis: The critical study of language (2nd ed.). Routledge.

Government of Pakistan. (2022). Strategic trade policy framework 2022-27. Ministry of Commerce.

Higher Education Commission Quality Assurance Agency. (2022). Annual report on the state of higher education in Pakistan. HEC.

Huang, D., & Zhang, L. J. (2022). English for Specific Purposes in China: A review of key research (2010–2021). English for Specific Purposes, 68, 1–14. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.esp.2022.05.003

Hutchinson, T., & Waters, A. (1987). English for specific purposes: A learning-centred approach. Cambridge University Press.

Hyland, K. (2018). Genre and second language writing. University of Michigan Press.

Juan, S. C. C. (2015). Innovation of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) curricula in Taiwanese universities [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. University of Newcastle, Australia.

Kachru, B. B. (1992). The other tongue: English across cultures (2nd Ed.). University of Illinois Press.

Khan, H. I., & Khan, A. (2020). A needs analysis for an English for Specific Purposes (ESP) course for computer science students in Pakistan. Asian Journal of Social Sciences and Management Studies, 7(2), 78–85.

Li, L., & Hu, G. (2021). Emerging trends in English for Specific Purposes research in Asia (2000–2020): A bibliometric analysis. Journal of English for Academic Purposes, 54, 101043. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jeap.2021.101043

Long, M. H. (Ed.). (2005). Second language needs analysis. Cambridge University Press.

Mahboob, A. (2022). Pakistani English. In A. Bolton, K. Botha, & A. Kirkpatrick (Eds.), The Routledge handbook of world Englishes (2nd ed., pp. 251–265). Routledge.

Manan, S. A., David, M. K., & Dumanig, F. P. (2023). Linguistic capital and inequality: A multi-sited ethnography of English-medium education policy and practice in Pakistani schools. International Journal of the Sociology of Language, 2023(281), 87–113.

Mansoor, S. (2021). Language policy and planning in Pakistan: A critical analysis. Oxford University Press.

Pakistan Business Council. (2023). Skills for the future: A survey of employer needs. PBC.

Pennycook, A. (2021). Critical applied linguistics: A critical re-introduction (2nd Ed.). Routledge.

Rahman, T. (2020). Language policy and identity construction in Pakistan. Oxford University Press.

LIBERAL JOURNAL OF LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE REVIEW
An International Double-Blind Peer-Reviewed Open Access Journal
ISSN (Online): 3006-3175 | ISSN (Print): 3006-3167
Volume 5, Issue 7 September, 2026

Rasheed, F., & Fareed, M. (2021). An evaluation of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) textbooks used in Pakistani universities. Journal of Education and Educational Development, 8(1), 158–174.

Shamim, F. (2021). English in Pakistan: A study in linguistic imperialism. In R. Rubdy & R. Tupas (Eds.), The politics of English in South Asia (pp. 45–62). Routledge.

Shamim, F., & Allen, P. (2020). English language teaching in Pakistan: Policies and practices. In G. Hall (Ed.), The Routledge handbook of English language teaching (pp. 543–557). Routledge.

Strevens, P. (1988). ESP after twenty years: A reappraisal. In M. Tickoo (Ed.), ESP: State of the art (pp. 1–13). SEAMEO Regional Language Centre.

Swales, J. M. (2019). The futures of ESP research: Diversity, interdisciplinarity, and impact. University of Michigan Press.

World Bank. (2022). Pakistan development update: Making the most of the demographic transition. World Bank Group.

Yin, R. K. (2018). Case study research and applications: Design and methods (6th Ed.). Sage.

Yousuf, M., & Ghani, M. (2021). Needs analysis for English for nursing purposes in the Pakistani context. Pakistan Journal of Medical Sciences, 37(3), 894–899.