Evaluating the Efficiency and Availability of Online ESP Courses for Pakistani Business Students: Prospects and Challenges

Warda Shafqat
M. Phil Scholar, Department of English, University of Gujrat

Isra Irshad
Lecturer, Department of English, University of Gujrat
Corresponding Author: * Dr. Isra Irshad (isra.irshad@uog.edu.pk)

ABSTRACT

This study aims to evaluate the effectiveness and accessibility of online ESP courses for Pakistani business students. It examines how well these courses improve students' language skills, assesses their availability and the challenges students face when registering and completing them, and explores students' perceptions and attitudes toward the structure and content of online ESP courses. A sample of 30 participants, including both males and females from the business sector enrolled in ESP classes, was selected for data collection. These participants are from the Virtual University of Pakistan. They completed a questionnaire with multiple-choice questions to gather their views on the online Business English course. The effectiveness and accessibility of online ESP courses are analyzed using Fred Davis's Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), proposed in 1989. The data were collected in numerical form, and the conclusions are based on descriptive analysis of the findings. The results indicate that Pakistani business students find the Business English course to be highly effective. The course significantly improves their language skills, and overall, students are satisfied with the online ESP course they are taking. However, some challenges remain in their learning process, highlighting areas that need improvement to facilitate better online ESP courses.

Keywords: ESP, Online courses, Effectiveness, Accessibility, Business students, Pakistan

INTRODUCTION

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) is a teaching field where English is taught as a second language within a learner-centered approach. ESP differs from General English (GE). While GE focuses on general English proficiency, ESP targets a specific field. For example, if someone works in medical, business, tourism, law, teaching, or any other area and wants to learn English related to that field, it is better to take an ESP course rather than a GE course. In ESP, the focus is on the learners' needs, which is why it is also called a learner-centered approach (Paltridge, 2013) (as cited in Armas et al., 2021; p.9). As ESP has evolved over time, branches such as English for Academic Purposes (EAP), English for Occupational Purposes (EOP), English for Vocational Purposes (EVP), and others have emerged, highlighting the importance of ESP (Belcher, 2009) (as cited in Armas et al., 2021; p.9).

Online courses are considered a beneficial addition to the teaching of ESP for various reasons. Google's Course Builder application is a free, useful, and adaptable tool for creating online courses. It seems simple and logical to use, and it provides a wide range of options and possibilities (Kovačević, 2020). One popular platform for offering online courses in a variety of subjects, including ESP, is Moodle. However, creating successful ESP courses on Moodle requires giving considerable thought to the learning goals, layout, material, and resources that can help students build language proficiency relevant to their professional endeavors. (Shalatska et.al, 2023).

The term "efficiency" describes the ability to complete the most valuable work with the least amount of energy and effort. It is the capacity to operate effectively without wasting time and resources. Furthermore, "availability" refers to the ease of being accessible or obtainable, meaning the attribute of being reachable to all users (Heyne, 2020). The research specifically addresses the following questions:

- To what extent do online ESP courses enhance the language proficiency of business students in Pakistan?
- What are the challenges that Pakistani business students have to face when enrolling in and completing online ESP courses?
- What are the learners' perceptions regarding the syllabus design, material selection, and teaching methods of Pakistani online ESP courses?
- What strategies can ESP teachers choose to improve or enhance online ESP courses in Pakistan?

The study is significant because it examines the efficiency and availability of online ESP courses in Pakistan. The study highlights how online ESP courses are conducted in Pakistan and the role they play in improving the language proficiency of the learners. The study is also important as it highlights that ESP learners face many difficulties during the online courses, such as financial or technological issues. It also highlights the satisfaction level of Pakistani ESP learners regarding the content and teaching methods. This research helps to explore solutions to improve online ESP courses in Pakistan.

This study is limited to ESP courses that are available online to business professionals in Pakistan. Thus, the researcher's primary focus is on the business sector in Pakistan. The business students of the Virtual University of Pakistan have been selected to collect data. In this research, the researcher has examined the efficiency and availability of online ESP courses for Pakistani business professionals.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review helps the researchers to catalogue the existing knowledge and ideas established on a topic. In this part of the study, the researcher has provided the stance of different writers on online education, online ESP courses, efficiency and availability of online ESP courses, tools to design online courses, and challenges faced by learners during online ESP courses.

Keegan has used the term distance education for online learning. Keegan divided this type of instruction into five categories: teacher and student separation during the course of the educational process; how an educational institution affects the planning and creation of instructional materials; the delivery of course material using electronic media; and the availability of two-way communication (Keegan, 1996). Sinclaire emphasized that online education significantly alters both the way students are taught and how they learn. Thus, it is increasingly important to think about what makes students happy with online education (Sinclaire, 2011). While talking about online learning, it must be kept in view that the gratification of learners is really important in making learning effective.

According to Sener and Humbert (2003), learners' satisfaction is an important component in developing an effective online program. According to one definition, student-teacher reciprocity and results are what constitute satisfaction (Thurmond, Wambach, Connors & Frey, 2002, p.171). One of the key pillars for assessing the effectiveness and success of the course teaching is learner satisfaction. Richard and Swan (2003) focused on how learners' satisfaction is affected by instructors' social presence in online teaching and learning. They discovered that learners' opinions of online learning and their perceptions of their social interaction were strongly correlated. It is reported by Sher (2009) that learner satisfaction level is considerably affected by interactions between learners as well as between teachers and their pupils.

Several studies have demonstrated that when students participate fully in the learning process, their performance improves. This learning process is termed as active learning, where learners are an active part of the learning process (Sarason & Banbury, 2003). Interactive instruction or "learning by doing" had positive learning outcomes (Picciano, 2002).

Avsheniuk et.al in their research article have focused on the gratification level of the learners about the online ESP learning programs offered to them. The data was collected using a questionnaire. The learners were asked various questions about their courses, such as the challenges faced by them during online classes, the effectiveness of the online ESP teaching, the accessibility of the resources used by ESP teachers, the evaluation of performance of ESP teachers, and the efficacy of online testing. The findings of the study revealed that students were generally happy and contented with online ESP courses, and they made the anticipated improvement in performance of ESP learning. The primary issues faced by the learners that influenced and impacted their online ESP learning were technical, academic, and communication issues (Avsheniuk et.al, 2021). Various studies have also been conducted to compare physical and online learning to check the satisfaction level of the students regarding both types of learning.

Zhang (2021) in the research study has examined blended learning in the context of teaching ESP. The results of the study revealed that both online and offline instruction together met the needs of the learners and supported their success in their chosen areas. The researchers used surveys as a tool for data collection. The data was then statistically analyzed to find whether or not the students were satisfied with the course results. The findings of the study showed that although students were happy, certain areas required work, such as the use of English and presentations. (Zhang, 2021).

In the present study, the researcher explores the areas previously untouched in the academic realm. It sheds light on the aspects hitherto overlooked or undiscovered. After reviewing the already done work on efficiency and availability of online ESP courses, it is clear that no work has been done in the context of examining the efficiency and availability of online ESP courses for business professionals in Pakistan. The researcher examines this in the framework of Fred Davis' Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), proposed in 1989. None of the previous studies in this regard have applied this model to analyze the findings.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The quantitative method of research is adopted in this research paper. According to Creswell (1994), quantitative research is the process of elucidating phenomena by the collection and analysis of numerical data utilizing mathematically based techniques, including statistics.

The study examines the efficiency and availability of online ESP courses for Pakistani business students. A sample of 30 participants has been selected for data collection. The sample includes 15 males and 15 females who belong to the business field and are taking online ESP courses. The participants of the study are from the Virtual University of Pakistan, one of the prestigious universities in Pakistan that offers a number of online courses related to different fields. They are provided with a questionnaire, i.e., multiple choice questions, where they are given different questions to check to what extent online ESP courses improve the language proficiency of business students and what hurdles are faced by the Pakistani business students when registering for and finishing the online ESP courses. The researcher has used a Likert scale questionnaire as a tool for analyzing data. A Likert scale questionnaire is a very popular tool that is used to assess the respondents' perceptions or opinions. The respondents are provided with a series of statements to which they agree or disagree.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The efficiency and availability of online ESP courses for Pakistani business students have been analyzed in the framework of Fred Davis' Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), proposed in 1989. TAM analyzes the adoption of new e-technology or new e-services. Davis' TAM is a popular model used for determining how consumers adopt new technologies. It has been demonstrated that users' perceptions of a technology's utility are linked to their attitudes and intentions to use it. In TAM, 'Perceived Usefulness' (PU) refers to the degree to which a user believes that utilizing a particular technology would improve performance. 'Perceived Ease-Of-Use' (PEOU) means the extent to which a user feels that using a specific technology would be effortless. According to TAM, a person's attitude towards using technology, their ensuing behavioral objectives, and their usage style are all determined by how simple and beneficial they think the technology is. Perceived ease of use was also believed to have an impact on how valuable people thought technology was (Masrom 2007).
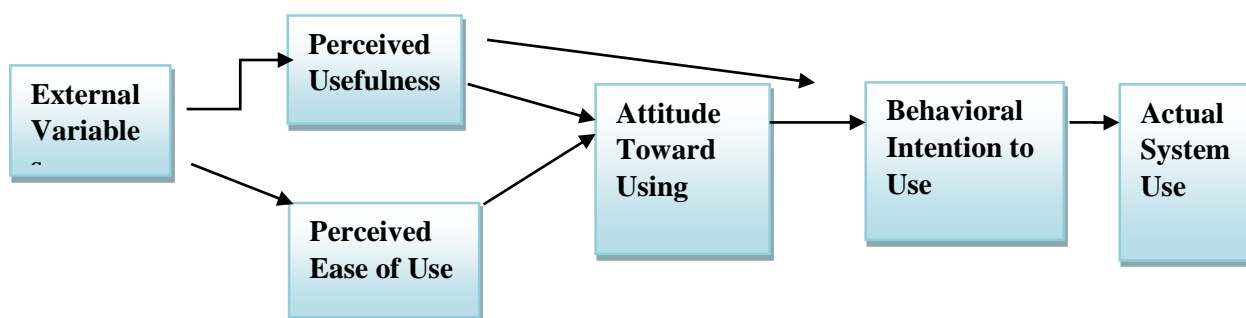

Figure 1. Technology Acceptance Model (TAM)

The fundamental tenet of TAM is that a user's behavioral intention, shaped by their PU and PEOU, determines whether they adopt technology (Wu, 2009). The degree to which a student intentionally plans whether to use the internet for academic purposes is known as behavioral intention (BI) (Ramayah & Ignatius, 2005; Clement & Bush, 2011; and Li & Huang, 2009). BI is closely linked to an individual's actual conduct. Additionally, TAM proposes that when people believe technology to be practical and user-friendly, they develop a positive attitude toward it (Lee et.al, 2003).

DATA ANALYSIS

The data collected from the questionnaire is presented in the form of tables. Table 1 provides information about the effectiveness of online ESP courses; Table 2 reflects the barriers faced by the learners during online ESP courses; Table 3 shows the learners' satisfaction level about online ESP courses, and Table 4 provides suggestions or solutions for enhancing the online ESP courses.

Table 1: Analyzing the Efficiency of online ESP courses for Pakistani Business Students

Categories	Options provided	No. of participants who selected the option
Effectiveness of Course	A. Very efficient	20
	B. Somewhat efficient	07
	C. Not very efficient	03
	D. Not efficient at all	0
Skills Improved	A. Report and email writing	17
	B. Communication skills	08
	C. Convincing skills	05
	D. No skills improved	0
Course Material	A. Interacting	08
	B. Somewhat interacting	12
	C. Not very interacting	10
	D. Not interactive all at	0

ANALYSIS

Table 1 provides information about the effectiveness of online ESP courses for Pakistani businesses students. 30 participants are given the questionnaire to collect the data. The data reflect that most of the participants view the business English course being taught to them as effective. 20 participants out of 30 view that the course being taught to them is very effective. 7 participants view the course as somewhat ineffective. There may be different reasons behind this. One of the major reasons behind this can be that it does not meet their requirements.

A very few participants show disappointment regarding the effectiveness of the online ESP course. Regarding the language skills improved by the course, most participants claim that it plays an important role in enhancing their writing skills, i.e., report and email writing. Little or less attention is paid to communication and convincing skills. Alongside writing skills, these two skills require further improvement because they are also the most widely used skills in the business field.

Regarding the course engagement, mixed reviews come to light. Almost half of the participants believe that the course being taught to them is somewhat interactive, and half are of the view that it is not that engaging. 7 out of 30 participants view the online ESP business English course as engaging or interactive. Keeping in view the above information, it is revealed that participants view the online ESP course as effective, which improves their basic language skills, and the material of the course is somewhat interactive.

Table 2: Analyzing the Availability Challenges faced by ESP learners

Categories	Options provided	No. of participants who selected the option
Challenges faced while taking course	A. Internet issues	10
	B. Fees	02
	C. Shortage of time	02
	D. Comprehension problems	01
	E. Insufficient technical expertise	15
Availability of course contents	A. Easily accessible	07
	B. Somewhat accessible	15
	C. Somewhat inaccessible	08
	D. Not accessible at all	0
Instructor's role	A. Supportive	10
	B. Somewhat supportive	10
	C. Not very supportive	05
	D. Not supportive all at	05

ANALYSIS

Table 2 provides information about the availability or accessibility of online ESP courses for Pakistani business students. It highlights the accessibility to the course contents, the challenges faced by the learners during their online ESP course, and the role of ESP instructors. The data show the participants' claim that it is not that easy to have full access to the course content. 15 out of 30 participants view the course content as somewhat accessible. Other participants have mixed reviews regarding the accessibility of course content, as 7 participants perceive the content is easily available, and 8 claim that it is somewhat inaccessible. The findings also highlight that learners face various issues during their online classes. One of the major issues faced by the learners is having extensive knowledge regarding technology usage. They lack technical expertise. The second major issue in this regard is the absence of stable internet. Learners often lose connection during their class and miss a lot of important information. Minor challenges include inflexible timing and a lack of comprehension about the content. ESP instructors' role during the class is also highlighted through the data. The reviews are mixed: half of the participants find teachers supportive, and the other half find them unsupportive. There can be several reasons behind this, as some students are shy, which makes they feel difficulty in communicating with their instructors, and another reason can be that some teachers put more focus on selected students and assist them at every step during the course. Keeping in view the above information, it is revealed that participants face different issues during the

course, such as unstable internet, lack of technical expertise, limited availability of course content, and somewhat unsupportive nature of instructors.

Table 3: Analyzing the Learners' Perception and Approval regarding online ESP courses

Categories	Options provided	No. of participants who selected the option
Satisfaction level	A. Contended	18
	B. Somewhat contented	08
	C. Somewhat dissatisfied	04
	D. Very dissatisfied	0
Suggest course to others	A. Yes	22
	B. No	0
	C. May be	08

ANALYSIS

Table 3 shows the satisfaction and perceptions of the ESP learners regarding the online ESP course they are enrolled in. The majority of participants show satisfaction with the course. Only a few participants are dissatisfied, and the reason behind this is the hurdles they have to face during the online ESP course. 22 participants out of 30 have recommended the course to others, and the other 8 participants are not sure about making such recommendations to others. There can be some personal reasons behind this act. Keeping in view the above information, it is revealed that participants are overall satisfied with the online ESP course.

Table No. 4 Suggestions for enhancing online ESP courses

Options provided	No. of participants who selected the option
A. More dynamic and captivating material	10
B. Reduced costs	02
C. Improved availability of teachers for advice	06
D. Flexible timing	02
E. Technical training	10

ANALYSIS

Table 4 highlights the suggestions provided by the learners who are taking an online Business English course for enhancing or improving online ESP courses. The data reveal that most participants believe that learners should be provided with the necessary technical training. Many learners face challenges in using technology, which in turn affects their learning during the course. Thus, proper measures should be taken to provide technical training to the ESP learners. The data also shows learners' suggestions regarding the content of the ESP courses. They suggest that the course material should be dynamic and captivating. It helps learners to be actively engaged during classes. Another important suggestion provided by the learners is that students need to have full access to their instructors, enabling them to ask questions freely. It will help them to comprehend the course material, which in turn, will improve their learning.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In this research, the researcher has analyzed the efficiency and availability of online ESP courses for Pakistani business students. The findings reveal that Pakistani business students view the Business English course being taught to them as effective. The course plays a vital role in enhancing the language skills of the business students, especially the writing skills, i.e., report and email writing. This is consistent with Dudley-Evans and St. John's (1998) argument, who stressed that ESP courses should be tailored around learners' academic and professional needs, with writing often being a main component for business students.

Regarding the course material, it is revealed that learners find it somewhat interactive. This suggests a need for more engaging and learner-centered materials, echoing Hutchinson and Waters (1987), who highlight the significance of materials that not only reflect learners' needs but also stimulate their interest. Learners face various issues during their online classes. One of the major issues faced by the learners is a lack of technical expertise. The second major issue in this regard is a lack of stable internet. These challenges align with the findings of Kukulska-Hulme and Shield (2008), who reported that technological

barriers often hinder the effectiveness of mobile and online learning environments in less-developed contexts. Some minor challenges include inflexible timing and a lack of comprehension about the content. The ESP learners provide suggestions for enhancing or improving online ESP courses, such as taking proper measures to give appropriate technical training to the ESP learners. The course material should be dynamic and captivating. Students must have full access to their instructors so that they can ask anything freely. It will help them in effectively comprehending the course, which in turn will improve their learning. This is consistent with Moore's (1989) theory of transactional distance, which highlights that frequent interaction is important for reducing psychological and pedagogical gaps in distance learning. In short, it is revealed that learners are overall satisfied with the online ESP course being taught to them. A few hurdles are there in their learning process that need improvement to enhance the online ESP courses.

REFERENCES

Armas, P., Aquino, M., Macias, E., & Reinoso, A. (2021). *English for specific purposes*. Editorial Group Compass.

Avsheniuk, N., Seminikhyna, N., Svyrydiuk, T., & Lutsenko, O. (2021). ESP students' satisfaction with online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic in Ukraine. *Arab World English Journal*. https://doi.org/10.24093/awej/covid2.8

Clements, J. A., & Bush, A. A. (2011, March 25–26). Habitual IS use and continuance. In *Proceedings of the Southern Association for Information Systems Conference*, Atlanta, GA, United States.

Creswell, J. W. (1994). *Research design: Qualitative & quantitative approaches*. SAGE Publications.

Dudley-Evans, T., & St. John, M. J. (1998). *Developments in English for specific purposes: A multi-disciplinary approach*. Cambridge University Press.

Heyne, P. (2020). Definition of efficiency and availability. In *The Library of Economics and Liberty*. https://www.econlib.org

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

Keegan, D. (Ed.). (1996). *Foundations of distance education* (3rd ed.). Routledge.

Kovačević, D. (2020). Creation of online courses in ESP and their use and application in the teaching process. In *2020 19th International Symposium INFOTEH-JAHORINA (INFOTEH)* (pp. 1–6). IEEE. https://doi.org/10.1109/INFOTEH48170.2020.9066343

Kukulska-Hulme, A., & Shield, L. (2008). An overview of mobile-assisted language learning: From content delivery to supported collaboration and interaction. *ReCALL, 20*(3), 271–289. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0958344008000335

Lee, S., Cho, H., Gay, G., Davidson, B., & Ingraffea, A. (2003). Technology acceptance and social networking in distance learning. *Educational Technology & Society, 6*(2), 50–61.

Li, Y., & Huang, J. (2009). Applying the theory of perceived risk and technology acceptance model in the online shopping channel. *World Academy of Science, Engineering and Technology, 53*, 919–925.

Masrom, M. (2007). Technology acceptance model and e-learning. *Technology, 21*(24), 81–95.

Moore, M. G. (1989). Editorial: Three types of interaction. *American Journal of Distance Education, 3*(2), 1–7. https://doi.org/10.1080/08923648909526659

Picciano, A. G. (2002). Beyond student perceptions: Issues of interaction, presence, and performance in an online course. *Journal of Asynchronous Learning Networks, 6*(1), 21–40.

Ramayah, T., & Ignatius, J. (2005). Impact of perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use and perceived enjoyment on intention to shop online. *Journal of Systems Management, 3*(3), 36–51.

Richardson, J. C., & Swan, K. (2003). An examination of social presence in online courses in relation to students' perceived learning and satisfaction. *Journal of Asynchronous Learning Networks, 7*(1), 68–88.

Sarason, Y., & Banbury, C. (2003). Active learning facilitated by using a game-show format: Who doesn't want to be a millionaire? *Journal of Management Education, 27*(4), 509–518. https://doi.org/10.1177/1052562903252658

Sener, J., & Humbert, J. (2003). Student satisfaction with online learning: An expanding universe. In *Elements of Quality Online Education: Practice and Direction* (Vol. 4, pp. 245–260). Sloan Consortium.

Shalatska, H. M., Zotova-Sadylo, O. Y., Balanaieva, O. V., & Kravtsov, H. M. (2023). Designing and evaluating ESP courses on Moodle for enhancing language skills in online learning. In *3L-Person* (pp. 61–79).

Sher, A. (2009). Assessing the relationship of student-instructor and student-student interaction to student learning and satisfaction in a web-based online learning environment. *Journal of Interactive Online Learning, 8*(2), 102–120.

Sinclaire, J. K. (2011). Student satisfaction with online learning: Lessons from organizational behavior. *Research in Higher Education Journal, 11*, 1–20.

Thurmond, V. A., & Conners, B. B. (2002). Evaluation of student satisfaction: Determining the impact of a web-based environment by controlling for student characteristics. *American Journal of Distance Education, 16*(3), 169–189. https://doi.org/10.1207/S15389286AJDE1603_4

Wu, Y.-T. (2006). University students' internet attitudes and internet self-efficacy: A study at three universities in Taiwan. *CyberPsychology & Behavior, 9*(4), 441–450. https://doi.org/10.1089/cpb.2006.9.441

Zhang, R. (2021). Blended course evaluation in the context of English for specific purposes: Accountability and development. *SAGE Open, 11*(4), 1–13. https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440211054502