

## English Language in the Context of Academic Performance: An Analysis

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### Abstract

*English has attained the status of world language. It is used almost in every sphere of life. It is the most widely used language in education. In Pakistan it is the official language and in schools it is used as the medium of instruction (MOI). English language proficiency has a significant role in academic performance. This paper aims to investigate the role of English language proficiency in the academic performance of students intending to pursue higher studies. The study was conducted in an English Language Institute named “Mind Your Language” in district Swat, KP. A sample of one English Language Institute was drawn from the population using the purposive sampling technique. A questionnaire containing 20 questions was administered. 60 of them were administered in three different sections (i.e., levels) of the same institute. All the questionnaires were returned. The participants’ responses to the questionnaire were analyzed by using SPSS. The findings of the study reveal that English language proficiency has a significant relationship with academic performance.*

**Keywords:** english language, medium of instruction, language proficiency, academic performance

### Introduction

English is spoken throughout the world. It is used for communication, diplomacy, business, trade, social status, electronic and print media; and, of course, education, especially at higher levels. In Pakistan, it is used as the Medium of Instruction (MOI) in both public and private schools. This expansion and wide usage have generated a lot of interest in matters associated with the teaching and learning of English (Cook, 2003). Admission to courses of higher education, especially in universities abroad, is often contingent on a high level of proficiency in this language (Chen, nd). Rogier (2012) notes that there is a significant increase of interest in learning the four skills of English, namely, listening, speaking, reading and writing.

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*Objectives*

The main purpose of the study is to investigate the role of English language in the academic performance of students, showing good or low scores in their results. The following objectives are indicated for purposes of this study:

- a) To estimate the status of English in educational institutions in district Swat.
- b) To investigate the role of English in the academic performance of the students.
- c) To judge the level of proficiency in English proficiency of students in a comparative framework.

**Review of Literature**

*English and Academic Performance*

The positive view

A number of researchers from different countries have investigated the impact of English language proficiency on academic performance. Although most of the studies (Kinyaduka & Kiwara, 2013; David, 2014; Rafiu & Nwalo, 2016; David, 2009; Komba et al., 2012 & Atetwe, 2013) support the view that there is a vital role of English language proficiency in better academic performance, a few of them (Arsad et al., 2014; Aina et al., 2013; Addow et al., 2013 & Cerise et al., 2015) do not ascribe to this view. A more recent study, that of Racca and Lasaten (2016), concludes that the relationship is significant enough to posit causality, even in subjects of different genres. A generalized high academic performance rests on a good grasp of the language.

Kinyaduka and Kiwara (2013) argue that due to its high social status at the international level, English remains the most preferred language in schools. They recommend that the language be used as the medium of instruction (MOI) in schools in Tanzania. David (2014) gives the same importance to English. In the same vein, Komba and Bosco (2015) conclude that the first language used at primary level as a medium of instruction can have a negative effect on the academic performance of students. Their study suggests that English should be used as MOI from the beginning to minimize difficulties later on. Salameh (2015) points out that learners belonging to wealthy and educated families are better in English and therefore show good results.

Similar conclusions are reached by Rafiu and Nwalo (2016), David (2009), Komba et al (2012), Atetwe (2013) and Shathele and Oommen (2015), who state that the main negative factor in the performance of female medical students is an inadequate grasp of English.

The bulk of this kind of research points to a correlation close enough to merit the assertion of a causal relationship.

*The Negative View*

A number of researchers (Arsad et al., 2014; Aina et al, 2013 & Addow et al., 2013) have concluded that English does not play an important role in academics. Arsad et al (2014) stated that there is no significant role of English language in the overall academic performance of students. Aina et al. (2013) support this view and state that there is no direct impact of English language on subjects like Physics or Computer Science. This view is further supported by Addow et al. (2013) who point out that there are factors other than English Language proficiency that affect the students' academic performance. Another study conducted by Cerise et al. (2015) in UAE also shows that there is no significant role of English language efficiency in quantitative subjects like Mathematics and Economics because these subjects need special problem-solving skills and calculation rather than English language skills, as it cannot of itself develop such skills.

*General*

The outcome depends on good teaching. In order to teach English language to learners effectively there should be well qualified and well experienced teachers to make the students show better result in their academic performance. In order to improve the students' English language proficiency, a study was conducted by Ewetan (2015) who established that there is a dire need for the teachers' practical experience in teaching English.

Failures and shortcomings in the academic performance of students have gained the attention of parents, teachers and curriculum designers. All of them are concerned to identify the variables that affect performance outcomes. Among the most prominent factors, insufficient English language proficiency is one that may result in poor performance. English is taught as the major subject in education in Pakistan right up to graduation levels, occupying a prominent position from the very beginning in a child's academic career English starts as a main subject. Even at the primary level in both public and private schools, many books are designed and taught in English. First it was only the English subject that was in English but now a great part of the course is designed in English. This is not the case with primary level only but up to graduation. Many students face this tough and laborious task throughout their academic career to learn English language as their academic performance rests in some measure on their mastery of English.

Cognizance is taken of both sets of opinions. The premise of this paper is that an ability to read, write, speak and understand other speakers in this language has a bearing on general academic performance. The methods and modalities whereby these are to be judged in the region of Swat in the context mentioned earlier, are outlined here.

#### *Research Questions*

1. Is there a distinguished position for English in the school curriculum in Pakistan?
2. Does English play a significant role in the academic performance of students in the Swat region of Pakistan?
3. In the light of their previous examination experience, do students feel the need to learn English?

#### *Delimitation of the Study*

The current study is delimited to investigating English in students' academic performance. The focus of the study is further narrowed down to one English teaching institution in the region of Swat in Pakistan

### **Research Methodology**

#### *Instrumentation*

#### *Sample and Research Design*

Quantitative research design is employed in this study. A descriptive research design will also be used to identify the factors that affects the students' performance in their previous exam (i.e., matriculation). The subjects comprise of sixty students (male) selected from the English Language Learning Institute named "Mind your Language Institute Swat". The sample size is chosen according to the literature reviewed (Addow et al., 2013; David, 2009; Rafiu and Nwalo, 2016; Cerise et al., 2015 &Arsad et al.,2014).

#### *Sampling Technique*

Purposive sampling technique was employed in this study to select the sample size. This was the preferred method for the collection of informative data.

#### *Ethical Considerations*

The participants of this research study were informed regarding the purpose of the study and they were also further told if they did not want that their identity be revealed, nothing of their personal information would be shared with anyone.

### *Research Instrument*

A questionnaire structured round four parts, each representing a different theme. 20 Likert-scale items were used. The questionnaire asked participants their opinion about their English language proficiency and its relation with their performance in the Metric and Intermediate examinations. The questionnaire also investigated the respondents' views about their studies in the future and role of their English Language proficiency in further studies.

The data collected in this study was analyzed by using tables to find the highest preference of willingness to indicate the relationship between English language proficiency and academic performance. Descriptive data analysis technique was also used.

### **Result and Analysis**

This section deals with the presentation of the data followed by discussion. 60 male students of age ranging from 16 to 20 participate in this study. The questionnaire is based on the four clusters as follows; The first part deals with the importance of English in general. The second part is related to results in previous examinations on the basis of their English language proficiency. The third part is relevant to the need of English in the overall curriculum. The fourth part represents the scope of English in pursuing higher studies. Each part is followed by five questions relevant to the whole. The students' qualifications are pitched somewhere between Metric and Intermediate (F.A/F.Sc.) The questions are presented and analyzed as under.

#### *Part 1: Importance of English Language in General*

Table 5.1 shows the importance and role of English. The majority of the students agree that English is the most widely used language in the world. Out of the 60 English language learning students, 50 (83%) students strongly agree while eight (14%) agree with the statement. Only two (3%) students disagree with the statement.

The table shows responses of the participants to Part 1, representing the importance of English language in general. Four questions (i.e., items) are shown in the tables. Item 2 is responded by the participants showing a strong agreement towards the statement. Out of 60 participants, 28 students strongly agree while 26 students agree with the statement. Consequently, the next question (Q.3) says that English is used as medium of instruction in schools and colleges and like the previous one, the participants, 24 in number, strongly agree while 24 agree with the statement. Similarly, Q 4 shows no importance of English language proficiency and thus 34 participants strongly disagree while 14 disagree

with the statement. Q 5 is related to the need of learning English and therefore, the statement is strongly supported by 38 students who strongly agree while 18 agree with the statement.

**Table 5.1***Importance of English Language*

|             |  |                   |          |         |       |                |
|-------------|--|-------------------|----------|---------|-------|----------------|
| Item 1      | English is the most widely used language in the world today. |                   |          |         |       |                |
|             |  | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree |
| Male/Female | 0  | 2                 | 0        | 8       | 50    | 60             |
| Total       | 0  | 2                 | 0        | 8       | 50    | 60             |
| Item 2      | Many books are written in English language.                  |                   |          |         |       |                |
|             |  | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree |
| Male/Female | 2  | 4                 | 0        | 26      | 28    | 60             |
| Total       | 2  | 4                 | 0        | 26      | 28    | 60             |
| Item 3      | English is the medium of instruction in schools/colleges.    |                   |          |         |       |                |
|             |  | Strongly disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly agree |
| Male/Female | 2  | 4                 | 6        | 24      | 24    | 60             |
| Total       | 2  | 4                 | 6        | 24      | 24    | 60             |
| Item 4      | We don't need English for computers/internet/mobile.         |                   |          |         |       |                |
|             |  | Strongly disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly agree |
| Male/Female | 34   | 14                | 6        | 2       | 4     | 60             |
| Total       | 34   | 14                | 6        | 2       | 4     | 60             |
| Item 5      | I think I should learn English.                              |                   |          |         |       |                |
|             |  | Strongly disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly agree |
| Male/Female | 2  | 0                 | 2        | 18      | 38    | 60             |
| Total       | 2  | 0                 | 2        | 18      | 38    | 60             |

The whole part 1 of the questionnaire shows a strong agreement by the respondents towards the importance of English language. More than 83% of the students (see table 5.1) are in the favor that there is a dire need of English language learning in general. The participants also declared that this is the age of English and without knowing English we cannot unlock the modern technology, internet, books etc. English language is needed not only in academics but in everyday life. English is prerequisite for better earnings, education, getting jobs, communication, business etc. Thus, English language has a distinguished place in modern world.

## **Part 2. The Importance of English Language in the Previous Exam Success**

This part of the questionnaire deals with the relationship between English language proficiency and success of the students in their previous exam. Table 5.2 shows that the first question of this part strongly goes in the favor of English language proficiency and its impact on the better academic performance of the students in their last attended exam. The table also shows that most of the students 28 (47%) strongly agree and 22 (37%) only agree with the first statement. This shows that almost all the students got high marks in their previous exam because they could understand English language and got low marks because they couldn't read and write in English.

This table represents part 2 of the questionnaire related to the English language proficiency and its role in the students' previous exam. It shows the role played by the English language proficiency and their success in their last exam. Q 2 shows that it was the English language proficiency that led them towards their success. 20 respondents strongly agree and 34 agree with the statement. Q 3 goes against such statement and says that there is no relationship between English language proficiency and success in exam. Therefore, 34 students strongly disagree while 18 students disagree with the statement. Q 4 shows no attempt in the previous exam due to no English language proficiency. To which ten participants strongly agree while 24 agree. Q. 5 says that there was no role of English language in the students' previous exam. 28 and 16 students out of 60 strongly disagree and disagree respectively.

**Table 5.2**

*Importance of English language in my previous exam.*

|                     |  |           |         |                |
|---------------------|--|-----------|---------|----------------|
| Item 1              | My previous success is based on my English language proficiency. |           |         | Total          |
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| <u>English Language in the Context of Academic Performance</u> |   |          |         | <u>Azizullah, Sabina</u> |                |       |
|--|---|----------|---------|--------------------------|----------------|-------|
|  | Strongly Disagree   | Disagree | Neutral | Agree                    | Strongly Agree |       |
| Male/Female  | 2   | 0        | 8       | 22                       | 28             | 60    |
| Total  | 2   | 0        | 8       | 22                       | 28             | 60    |
| Item 2   | I got high percentage in my previous exam because I could write in English.                     |          |         |                          |                |       |
|  | Strongly Disagree   | Disagree | Neutral | Agree                    | Strongly Agree | Total |
| Male/Female  | 2   | 0        | 4       | 34                       | 20             | 60    |
| Total  | 2   | 0        | 4       | 34                       | 20             | 60    |
| Item 3   | There is no relationship between English language and exam.                                     |          |         |                          |                |       |
|  | Strongly disagree   | Disagree | Neutral | Agree                    | Strongly agree | Total |
| Male/Female  | 34  | 18       | 4       | 2                        | 2              | 60    |
| Total  | 34  | 18       | 4       | 2                        | 2              | 60    |
| Item 4   | I didn't attempt some questions in my last exam because I couldn't write the answer in English. |          |         |                          |                |       |
|  | Strongly disagree   | Disagree | Neutral | Agree                    | Strongly agree | Total |
| Male/Female  | 12  | 6        | 8       | 24                       | 10             | 60    |
| Total  | 12  | 6        | 8       | 24                       | 10             | 60    |
| Item 5   | There is no role of English in my previous success  |          |         |                          |                |       |
|  | Strongly disagree   | Disagree | Neutral | Agree                    | Strongly agree | Total |
| Male/Female  | 28  | 16       | 4       | 4                        | 8              | 60    |
| Total  | 2   | 0        | 2       | 18                       | 38             | 60    |

The data presented in the above table shows that the overall success of the students in their previous exam is due to their English language proficiency. And all those students who couldn't know and understand English language didn't attempt the questions in the exam. The students are going to learn English language on the basis of their previous exam success and experience in which they have felt the need for learning English language.



### Part 3. The importance of English language proficiency in the current academics

This part of the questionnaire deals with the importance and role of English language in the current study of the students in their academics. The table given below illustrates the importance and role of English language in the students' academics. Out of 60 participants 48 (80%) strongly agree while 12 (20%) agree with the statements that they need to learn English because having no English language proficiency they will not be able to show better performance in their academics.

The data presented in the table strongly supports the importance of English language in the students' current academic performance. Q 2 says that without knowing and understanding English language we cannot go ahead. With this statement 40 participants strongly agree while 18 agree and no respondent shows disagreement to the statement. Q 3 indicates that English is not the language of competition. The participants disagree with this statement and 22 of them show strong disagreement while 18 show disagreement. Q 4 is in the favor that learning English is the need of the day. Showing a strong agreement 32 students strongly agree while 20 agree with this statement, only two disagree and two strongly disagree. Thus, the response of 97% respondents strongly goes in the favor of the statement. Q 5 goes in contrast as compared to the previous question that there is no need of learning English for the students which is treated with strong disagreement by the respondents. 42 of them strongly disagree and ten disagree with the statement.

**Table 5.3**  
*Importance of English language in my life*

| Item 1      | I need to learn English  |          |         |       |                | Total |
|-------------|--|----------|---------|-------|----------------|-------|
|             | Strongly Disagree  | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree |       |
| Male/Female | 0  | 0        | 0       | 12    | 48             | 60    |
| Total       | 0  | 0        | 0       | 12    | 48             | 60    |
| Item 2      | I want to learn English because without this I can't go ahead. |          |         |       |                | Total |
|             | Strongly Disagree  | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree |       |
| Male        | 2  | 0        | 0       | 18    | 40             | 60    |

| Male/Female |                   |   |         |       |                |       |  |
|-------------|-------------------|---|---------|-------|----------------|-------|--|
| Total       | 2                 | 0   | 0       | 18    | 40             | 60    |  |
| Item 3      |                   | <u>English is not the language of competition.</u>        |         |       |                |       |  |
|             | Strongly disagree | Disagree  | Neutral | Agree | Strongly agree | Total |  |
| Male/Female | 22                | 18  | 8       | 2     | 10             | 60    |  |
| Male        |                   |   |         |       |                |       |  |
| Total       | 22                | 18  | 8       | 2     | 10             | 60    |  |
| Item 4      |                   | <u>I think English is the need of the day.</u>            |         |       |                |       |  |
|             | Strongly disagree | Disagree  | Neutral | Agree | Strongly agree | Total |  |
| Male/Female | 2                 | 2   | 4       | 20    | 32             | 60    |  |
| Male        |                   |   |         |       |                |       |  |
| Total       | 2                 | 2   | 4       | 20    | 32             | 60    |  |
| Item 5      |                   | <u>There is no need of learning English for students.</u> |         |       |                |       |  |
|             | Strongly disagree | Disagree  | Neutral | Agree | Strongly agree | Total |  |
| Male/Female | 42                | 10  | 2       | 2     | 4              | 60    |  |
| Male        |                   |   |         |       |                |       |  |
| Total       | 42                | 10  | 2       | 2     | 4              | 60    |  |

The data related to the third part of the questionnaire strongly supports the fact that there is a great need of English for the students of today. In current era English is the dominant language across the globe. A person having no English language proficiency is blind towards the modern world in terms of communication. Without knowing, we live in the environment of English-speaking community as there are so many things speaking English. They can be in the shape of modern technology like TV, internet, computer, mobile and most importantly media and especially social media used by every layman of the country. Impact of such variables compels us to learn English language.

#### **Part 4: Importance of English language proficiency in the future**

This last part of the questionnaire makes sure that the future is of English language. English language is developed more and more with the passage of time. Therefore, everyone wants to be strong in this field. Table 5.4 shows the importance of English language in the future. The first statement indicated no need of English language in the future but the responses are against the statement. 44 (73%) students strongly disagree

whereas 14 (23%) disagree with the statement. Only two students strongly agree with the statement but it may be due to not comprehending the statement properly.

The fourth part of the data collected through questionnaire present the results that how and why English language is needed in the students' future study. Q 2 is about the importance, need and role of English language in higher studies. Many of the participants, 30 strongly agree and the other 24 agree with the statement that there is a high need of English in the higher studies. Q 3 is about the English language and entrance tests to colleges and universities for further study. To this statement 28 responses go in the favor of strong agreement while 24 with agreement. Only four students show strong disagreement and two show disagreement. Q 4 shows no necessity of English language in subjects like Physics, Chemistry, Biology, Math, Economics etc. but more than half of the respondents go in strong disagreement and 12 students agree with the statement. Q 5 shows the role of English language in the future success of the students. 34 participants show strong agreement with the statement while 16 show agreement only.

**Table 5.4**

*Importance of English language in my future study.*

|             |      | I think there would be no need of English in future.                           |          |         |       |                |       |
|-------------|------|--|----------|---------|-------|----------------|-------|
| Item 1      |      | Strongly Disagree  | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree | Total |
| Male/Female | Male | 44   | 14       | 0       | 0     | 2              | 60    |
| Total       |      | 44   | 14       | 0       | 0     | 2              | 60    |
|             |      | English is needed in higher studies.   |          |         |       |                |       |
| Item 2      |      | Strongly Disagree  | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree | Total |
| Male/Female | Male | 6  | 0        | 0       | 24    | 30             | 60    |
| Total       |      | 6  | 0        | 0       | 24    | 30             | 60    |
|             |      | English language proficiency is required for college/university entrance test. |          |         |       |                |       |
| Item 3      |      | Strongly disagree  | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly agree | Total |

| <b>English Language in the Context of Academic Performance</b>                                |                   |          |         |       | <b>Azizullah, Sabina</b> |       |
|---|-------------------|----------|---------|-------|--------------------------|-------|
| Male/Female   | 6                 | 0        | 2       | 24    | 28                       | 60    |
| Male  |                   |          |         |       |                          |       |
| Total   | 6                 | 0        | 2       | 24    | 28                       | 60    |
| <hr/>   |                   |          |         |       |                          |       |
| English is not necessary for subjects like Physics, Chemistry, Biology, Maths, Economics etc. |                   |          |         |       |                          |       |
| Item 4  | Strongly disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly agree           | Total |
| Male/Female   | 34                | 12       | 0       | 8     | 6                        | 60    |
| Male  |                   |          |         |       |                          |       |
| Total   | 34                | 12       | 0       | 8     | 6                        | 60    |
| <hr/>   |                   |          |         |       |                          |       |
| My future success will be based on my English language proficiency.                           |                   |          |         |       |                          |       |
| Item 5  | Strongly disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly agree           | Total |
| Male/Female   | 10                | 0        | 0       | 16    | 34                       | 60    |
| Male  |                   |          |         |       |                          |       |
| Total   | 10                | 0        | 0       | 16    | 34                       | 60    |

The fourth and last part of the questionnaire show the role of English language in higher studies in future. The results show that almost all of the students want to learn English to go ahead. Otherwise they will not achieve success in their academics in higher studies in future.

### **Conclusion**

English has got a permanent place in education as well as in one's personal life. The importance of English language cannot be easily denied in education, teaching learning process as well as in communication across the world. This view has already been supported by Racca and Lasaten (2016). To a significant extent English has helped with the idea of the world as a global village. A common mode of communication is presupposed if diverse nations and people are to connect with each other. It has a distinguished position in the curriculum (see research question 1) and is used as a medium of instruction (MOI) in almost all of the schools, which answers the first question of the study. It is used as MOI because of its due role in education. Our national language is Urdu and mother tongue is Pashto in Swat but priority is given to English (see introduction). Schools, both public and private, give primacy to English, and parents want to admit their children in schools where English is taught well.

In this regard David (2014) has determined that incompetence in English may lead learners to a generalized weakness in their academic

output. English is needed for almost all subjects, Chemistry, Physics, Biology, Mathematics, Economics etc. because these subjects are primarily designed in English. This answers the second question of this research study.

In academics, students indicate a marked interest in English in order to do well in their examinations. The results of the study strongly suggest the importance and role of English language in meeting this outcome (see reviewed literature). Every student in the study favored the development of proficiency in this language, partly because they can see the advantage it gives to students who have it. They also see the current need of the day for learning English. This runs counter to what Arsad et al., 2014; Aina et al., 2013 and Addow et al., 2013, observe in their studies, namely, that English has no significant role to play in academic performance (see objectives).

Most of the respondents under study were young men who had passed the Metric exam and were about to enter college for further study. The result shows that they had felt the need of English language proficiency in their previous exam as well as the need of English language proficiency for higher studies. This answers the third question of the study (see research question 3).

The results of this study support the primary hypothesis that proficiency in English has a significant impact on student performance. They should draw the attention of students, parents, teachers, curricula designers and planners to the continuing importance of English in education. Most subjects at secondary and intermediate levels are in English. It is the vehicle and carrier of information in these subjects, and would therefore need to be learnt well if students are to benefit from their studies.

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