Fostering Academic Success through English Language Learning and Teaching at Rural Universities

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Abstract

In rural higher education settings, the lack of access to quality English language resources presents a significant barrier to developing the essential language skills that underpin academic success. This study examines the essential English language learning and teaching competencies required by students and faculty in rural higher education institutions, with a specific focus on the southern Tamil Nadu context. Adopting a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design, the study examines the needs of students and faculty in relation to their skills, resource types, instructional methods, facilities, and technological supports for effective English language acquisition. Two tailored questionnaires—Questionnaire A for students and Questionnaire B for faculty were disseminated through Google Forms to collect data on English language needs and practices. Frequency analysis of the responses revealed a pronounced demand for English for Academic Purposes (EAP), with participants highlighting the importance of enhanced language proficiency to support academic performance. Furthermore, the study identifies gamification as a promising pedagogical approach to increase student engagement and foster more effective language learning. The findings suggest that targeted interventions, including innovative and technology-driven teaching strategies, are essential to bridge the language proficiency gap and promote academic success in these rural educational environments.

Keywords: English language learning, Rural higher education, LSRW skills, Academic, and Technology

1. Introduction

English is the language of communication regardless of the current multilingual and multicultural world. This language has been accorded such a status for historical, political, and economic reasons, including colonialism by Britain and the rise of the United States to power (Dhivya et al., 2024). Modern English serves as the first or second language for more than 1.5 billion people worldwide, which makes it an essential language of global affairs, diplomacy, business, traveling, and tourism (Dhillon & Murray, 2021). Crystal (2003) notes that English has spread more extensively than any other language, being used both in written and spoken forms more frequently worldwide. Moreover, there is a significant prominence of English as a means of obtaining vital information in a contemporary information society. English is the language of science, education, and information products, which makes mastering the language a useful skill to gain and enhance professionally and personally. Being the language of knowledge, English matters to those who need to obtain and disseminate knowledge in specific subject areas (Tastanbek, 2024). English brings ideas, expressions, art, and cultural practices from one English-speaking community to another in different parts of the world. Because the modern globalized world is becoming more interconnected, English is the language that unites people, which creates definite advantages. This extensive use of English is fostering fresh prospects for cultural and academic interactions to boost the potential of better intercontinental relations, as Phillipson pointed out (Zhang & Zhang, 2024).

In the field of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), English for Specific Purposes (ESP) is a focused approach that helps learners quickly understand the language and terminology needed for their specific job or profession. Unlike general English, ESP is designed to fit the particular context where the Second Language Learner will use the language, making it more relevant and practical (Tastanbek, 2024). Hutchinson and Waters (1984) explain that ESP is based on the needs of the learner, aiming to develop the communication skills required to perform well in their professional or academic tasks.

ESP courses are usually designed according to the needs of social sectors such as business, medicine, engineering, law, and tourism.

According to Rahman (2015), ESP is not a product but a process of language teaching that aims at enhancing learners' efficiency in their fields of specialization. Managing the ESP course allows for the incorporation of language acquisition tailored to a particular industry, specialist terms, and appropriate communication patterns necessary for effective and accurate business interaction to be learned (Bruce, 2021). Furthermore, ESP provides learners with the confidence they need to traverse their specialized areas, thus acting as catalysts towards personal and professional development as well as improving the performance of the entities they work for. ESP focuses on developing learners' communicative competence to meet the specific demands of their academic or professional fields. It aims to equip learners with the language skills necessary to perform effectively in their respective areas of expertise, ensuring that the language they learn is relevant to their particular academic or occupational contexts. The proves to be more efficient and practical to learn the language in a targeted approach, due to which ESP has become an essential tool for today's world (Benesch, 2009).

EAP plays a crucial role in teaching and facilitating students with language skills in the most significant academic context to complement their academic studies in higher learning institutions such as universities and colleges (Huriati et al., 2023). EAP does not focus on the generic language acquisition and development of the language necessary to read academic material, write academic papers, listen to lectures, and converse in scholarly settings, as well as think critically. A study by Elbes & Oktaviani (2022) explains that English for Academic Purposes (EAP) encompasses all aspects of English communication necessary in an educational setting. EAP can be described as an effective, academic, and functional use of language specifically designed for study purposes within formal education systems. It plays a critical role in higher education, as it equips students with the advanced language skills required to excel in academic environments. EAP prepares learners to meet the linguistic demands of complex academic tasks, making it an essential skill for success in higher learning (Clement et al., 2015).

With the globalization of education, English has emerged as a vital medium through which students, particularly those who have studied English in earlier educational stages, enter universities and engage with international research. Common components of EAP curricula are the areas of academic writing, note-taking, critical reading, and presentation skills that address context-specific to the academic sector (Kumayas & Lengkoan, 2023). At the same time, such aspects as the effectiveness of education are not limited only by the ability to transfer educational knowledge and cognition, but the ability to interest students as well. Finally, gamification the use of game design in a non-game domain is revealed to be powerful for improving educational activities (Kumayas & Lengkoan, 2023). Using elements like rewards, challenges, and progressions is a great way to turn a typical class into an incredible space where students will remain interested and engaged. Boroujeni et al. (2013) emphasize that gamification can enhance engagement by fostering a deeper connection with the learning content, thereby cultivating intrinsic motivation among learners.

The use of gamification enables learners to embrace more control over their learning process and makes learning a more passive process (Dhivya et al., 2023). These qualities as leaderboards, badges as well as achievements, assist students in understanding their performance and encourage them in their learning process, improving both abilities and knowledge. As with other pedagogical approaches (Flowerdew, 2016) emphasizes that incorporating game mechanics into a learning environment fosters experimentation, risk-taking, and improved learning outcomes among students.

Despite the widespread acknowledgment of the importance of English language proficiency in higher education, there remains a notable gap in the literature regarding the specific needs and challenges faced by students and faculty in rural higher education institutions, particularly in southern Tamil Nadu. Most existing research focuses on urban and semi-urban contexts or generalized approaches to English language teaching and learning, neglecting the unique obstacles and resource limitations encountered by rural learners and educators. This gap is critical, given that rural higher education institutions often lack access to quality language resources, updated pedagogical methods, and technological infrastructure, all of which can significantly hinder academic success. Moreover, while the significance of English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and English for Specific Purposes (ESP) has been explored in broader contexts, there is limited empirical evidence on how these approaches can be effectively tailored to the rural educational environment. Addressing this research gap is essential to ensure that rural students and faculty can develop the English language skills necessary to compete academically and professionally, thereby contributing to social and economic equity.

2. Literature Review

Research has emerged in different areas of English as the language of globalization, especially the gigantic part played by Korea, where discrepancies in the English language regarding career employment communication have undergone probing (Benesch, 2009). The study has also highlighted the relationship between English literature coursework and language as a second language learning in higher learning institutions as essential in enhancing language capability (Boroujeni et al., 2013). In addition, there is virtually an almost complete absence of empirical research focusing on English education in primary and secondary schools in China, which makes it all the more imperative to fill that particular research gap (Qiu et al., 2024). Altogether, these reviews underscore the versatile importance of English and stress the key functions of occupation, communication, and schooling processes occurring in the world.

It is stated that there is a need to move from a strategy-focused area by concentrating on self-directed learning and acknowledging the importance of Business English (Salmani-Nodoushan, 2020). In ESP, the significance of learning strategies is highlighted, particularly concerning their role in enhancing business students' reading skills and overall development in ESP. Furthermore, the significance of the first language in teaching ESP has been emphasized with the stress of the need for learners to understand the roles of language in particular contexts (Kovalenko & Skvortsova, 2022). Although effective second language acquisition is still significant in learning

English, the forthcoming area is the usage of English for Academic Purposes (EAP). EAP has been described as being both dynamic and multifaceted, as one that demands an inclusive model of instruction that will address the diverse Student Learning Context of a diverse group of students (Ghanizadeh et al., 2015). To describe how approaches such as Systemic Functional Linguistics and Academic Literacies have been shown to work hand in hand. Furthermore, there is literature on formulaic language in EAP and its consequences for comprehension of academic talk and the improvement of learner outcomes (Haghparast-Bidgoli & Batura, 2015)

Over the past several years, important developments in EAP have also been observed, especially in the domain of academic writing since 2020. The concept of academic literacies has helped shift and broaden the focus to modality, identity, and text as part of developing a broad knowledge of EAP and its theories and applications (Othman et al., 2023). In addition, literature incorporation into the EAP curriculum was discussed as a way to promote knowledge mediation and the value of literary reading (Othman et al., 2023). Similarly, the introduction of site-based applications and the use of a gamification approach has a significant impact on learning, especially languages, as seen in various fields but more so in the learning realm (Deterding et al., 2011). Language games have emerged as an effective instructional strategy for enhancing vocabulary acquisition, as they promote learner engagement, motivation, and the contextual use of words. A recent meta-analysis by Pradheepa, Gurusamy, and Pushpanathan (2025) synthesizes empirical findings and confirms that language games significantly improve vocabulary retention and learner interest across various educational settings. A bibliometric review of gamification literature reveals that it enhances learners' engagement, motivation, and competition in ESL classrooms when incorporated properly (Hamari et al., 2016). Nevertheless, there are issues with the application of gamification that persist, and thus, there is a need to determine best practices in implementing gamification and the frameworks to support such implementation, which has been discussed by Landers (Dhivya, Hariharasudan, & Nawaz, 2023).

The Need analysis is critically important for defining the deficiency in content and comprehensiveness, and oftentimes is often used when studying the problem of the efficacy of English language teachers, for example, (Kumayas & Lengkoan, 2023). The need to ensure the analysis is formalized is well illustrated in the need for the development of relevant material and assessment programs, particularly within innovative projects. This process is crucial in the ESP area as the 21st century brings new issues to teachers of English, for example, teachers have to constantly update themselves to keep up with the technological advancements as well as the students' needs (Huriati et al., 2023). Research has explained the importance of structured conversations and both language and paralinguistic aspects in preparing and developing oral literacy competencies in English Literature learning, the role of preparation, and confidence in oral competence. In sum, the literature supports the need for needs analysis for English language learning and all the factors that have to be taken into consideration to enhance learning achievements in education (Elbes & Oktaviani, 2022)

The study on ESP in China has shown an increasing number of publications over the last two decades, with special emphasis on the association between ESP and college English, academic English, and teaching methods (Qiu et al., 2024). Nevertheless, according to the literature, there is a need for additional empirical research to support the provided conclusions. Despite the increasing discussions on ESP in China, what is lacking most significantly now is practical study, especially in the context of Primary and Secondary education settings. Much research exposes theoretical frameworks with little support in the form of empirical evidence to support these conclusions (Salmani-Nodoushan, 2020).

In the 21st century, the purpose and function of using English have shifted from merely a means of passing information to becoming the medium for conveying information in various cross-over professional, academic, and specialized spheres (Dhivya, Gurusamy, et al., 2024). These systems challenge many a student and faculty member to provide the kind of language competence that the globalized world expects of them (Ibanez et al., 2014).

Such differences between the previously presupposed levels of English proficiency and the actual language performance of learners and teachers call for an extensive strategy to address the development of improved language skills. Given the ever-increasing dynamics of international relations, people should acquire sufficient language abilities to become active members of the global community. By doing so, this current study aims to fill the identified gap focused on the determination of language needs of students and teachers in rural higher learning institutions, especially in the southern region of Tamil Nadu. The goal of the study is a quest for an enhanced understanding of the existing and potential teaching practices and curricular approaches that foster high academic and career accomplishment (Khaldi et al., 2023).

The purpose of this study is to establish the areas of necessity for learning the English language for students and teachers in higher learning institutions with special regard to the rural area of a southern district of Tamil Nadu. Consequently, through identifying the shortcomings in the present language acquisition and teaching and learning resources and methodologies of the targeted contexts, the study aims to suggest efficient strategies for better achievement in the mastery of English as a foreign language, as well as overhauling the standard teaching and learning in the targeted context.

Research Questions

1. What are the specific skills, types, and methods needed by faculty and students in rural higher education institutions to enhance their English language proficiency for academic success?

2. How do available faculty and technology impact the effectiveness of English language teaching methods in rural higher education institutions?

Conceptual Framework

The Figure 1 conceptual framework illustrates the process of conducting a needs analysis for faculty and students in rural higher education institutions. The framework identifies key areas of focus: skills, types, methods, facilities, and technology. These components are critical for understanding the requirements of both students and faculty in improving English language proficiency. The framework leads to an analysis of these factors, which will ultimately result in findings (results) that help determine necessary interventions or improvements in language learning and teaching. This structured approach ensures that the analysis is comprehensive, addressing all elements required for academic success in rural education settings. The conceptual framework has been adapted and modified from the previous research (Azhar et al., 2025).
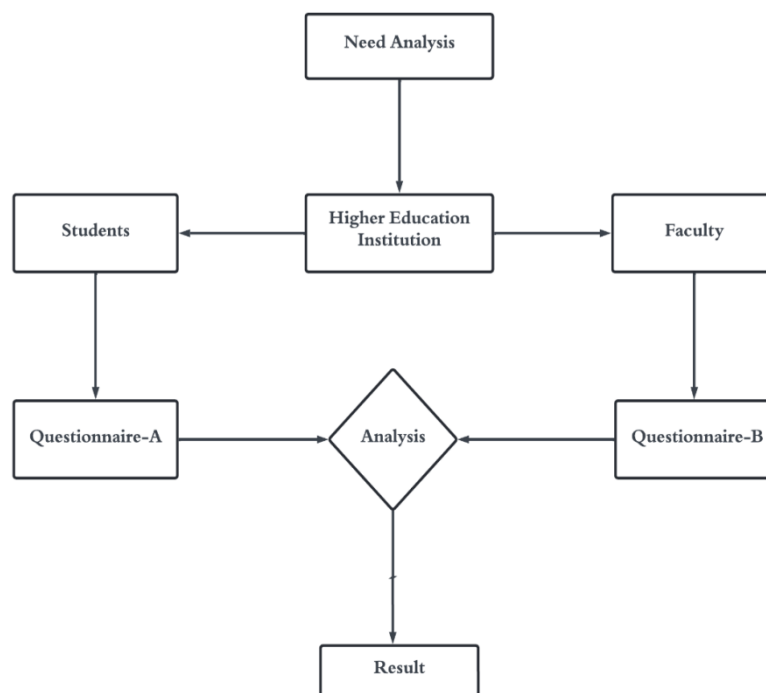

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

3. Method

It is primary research that utilized a quantitative approach in conducting cross-sectional survey research. Figure 2 reveals that the study targeted participants from Higher Education institutions in the southern region of Tamil Nadu. A random sampling method was employed in the selection of students and Faculty who offered their opinions and information on these institutions. Data was collected using two structured questionnaires: Questionnaire-A for students and Questionnaire-B for faculty. A total of 300 students and 100 faculty members who expressed interest in participating completed these questionnaires.   The idea was to obtain detailed information on the English language demands and needs of all the students. After the survey was administered, the collected data were deliberately gathered and analyzed. The outcomes of the study were arrived at from this accumulated data. Figure 2 represents the research design, which has been adapted and modified from the previous research (Dhivya, Hariharasudan et al., 2023; Ragmoun & Alfalih, 2023).
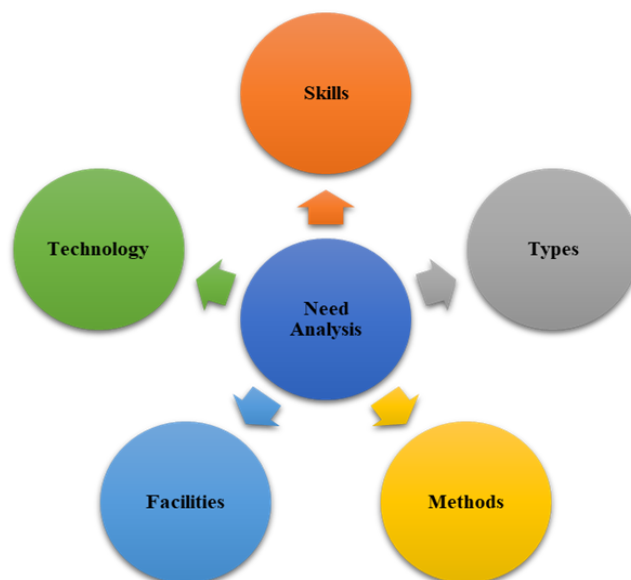
Figure 2. Research Design

Participants

In this quantitative study, 100 faculty members of Higher Education Institutions in the southern region of Tamil Nadu, who teach English Language Teaching, were given separate questionnaires. The ethical consideration was observed, and every participant signed a consent to participate in this study. Survey participants for this study were selected purposively. Table 1 shows the demographic details of the study in which 300 undergraduate students were selected as participants. Of these participants, 75% were female and 25% were male. Almost all participants were in their first year of study at a university located in the southern region of Tamil Nadu. The age of the faculty was 25 and above, and the teaching experience of the faculty obtained was 5 and above but below 10. Among these experienced faculty members in HEIs, only 25% had a doctoral level while 75% had Undergraduate degrees and Master's degrees. Half of the faculty had specialized in English literature and linguistics, while the other half were experienced teachers of the English language.

Table 1. Demographic details

S. No.	Category	Faculty Details	Students Details
1.	Gender	Male = 66 Female = 34	Male = 200 Female = 100
2.	Age	Between 25 to 30 = 39 Between 30 to 35 = 17 Above 35 = 44	Between 17 to 20 = 270 Between 20 to 25 = 30 Above 25 = 0
3.	Region	Rural = 70 Urban = 30	Rural = 165 Urban = 135
4.	Mother Tongue	Tamil = 92 Telugu = 3 Hindi = 5 others = 0	Tamil = 115 Telugu = 148 Hindi = 9 others = 28
5.	Area of the Study	---	Arts = 48 Science = 6 Engineering = 196 Medical = 25 Law = 24 Management = 1
6.	Year	---	I = 149 II = 25 III = 25

		IV = 75	
		V = 26	
7.	Qualification	Diploma = 0 Undergraduate = 6 Postgraduate = 49 M. Phil = 20 Ph. D = 25	---
8.	Work Experience	Below 5 years = 37 Between 5 to 10 years = 20 Above 10 years = 35	---

Instruments

The Google Forms-based questionnaires sought to assess the learning needs and demands of students and faculty members in HEI about learning English. In each of the questionnaires, 20 questions were posed, in an equal proportion in Skills, Types of English, Learning Methods, Facilities, and Technology. The contents of the questionnaire were operationalized by five experts, the coordinators of the Language Educators in the field of ELT, and the Cronbach alpha value is 0.834

Procedure

The principal of the concerned HEIs extended assistance in collecting all the data distributed among the faculty and the students to ensure the success of this research endeavor. Data collection from both faculty members and students was facilitated through Google Forms. To ensure comprehensive data collection, all fields of the questionnaire were made mandatory for submission. The collected data were then stored securely. Subsequently, descriptive statistics were employed to analyze the gathered data. This analysis provided valuable insights into the English language needs and requirements of both faculty members and students within the HEIs.
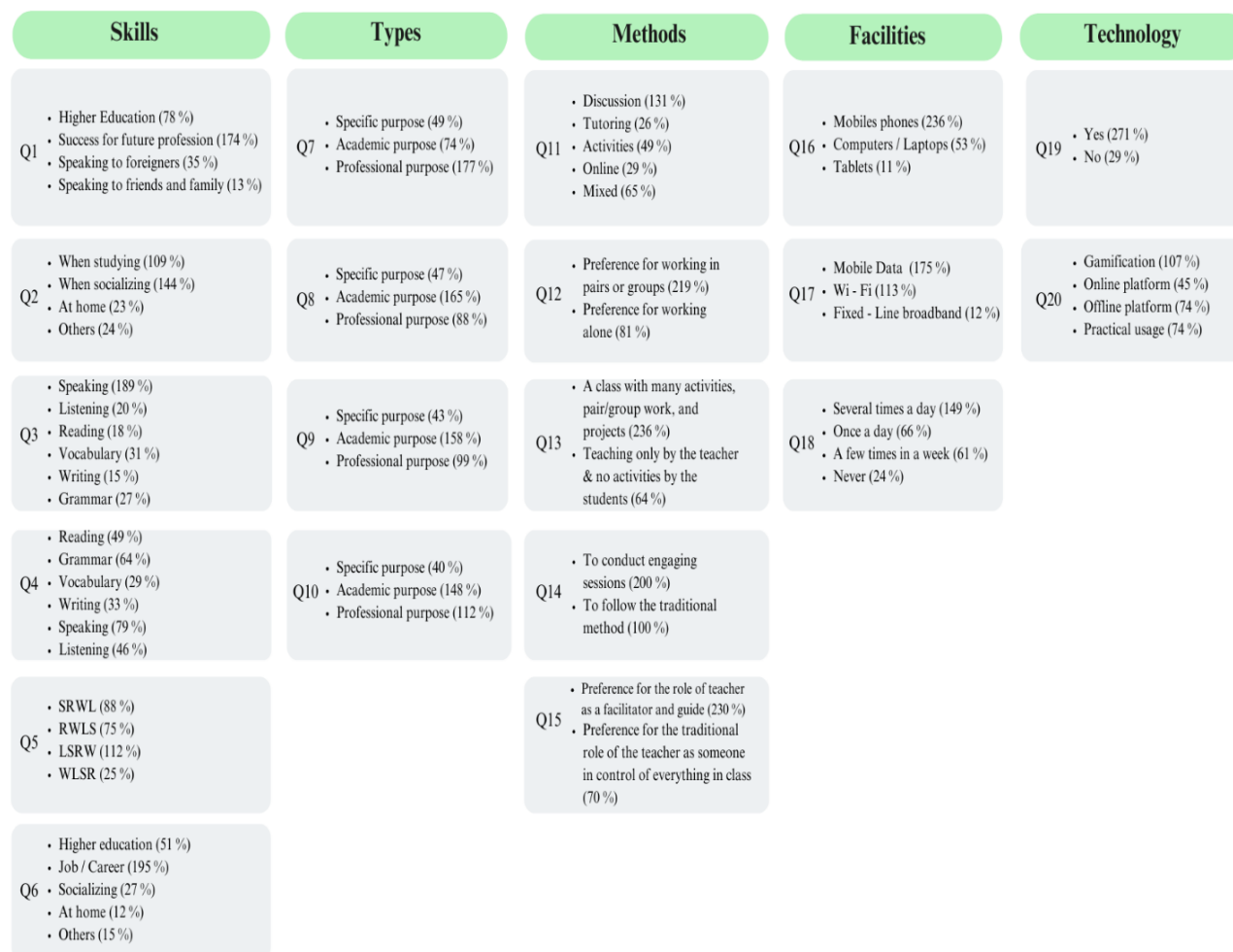
4. Results

Figure 3. Percentage response of Students

In Figure 3, questions Q1 to Q6 are categorized under the Skills factor. Q1 received the highest response rate of 174 students, indicating a strong inclination towards grasping the essentiality of learning English. For Q2, 144 respondents emphasized the importance of understanding the diverse applications of English in various domains. Q3 garnered the highest response rate of 189 students, highlighting the critical need for developing English language skills, particularly in the areas of Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing (LSRW). Q4 received a response rate of 79 students, underscoring the significance of specific skills to be emphasized in classroom settings. Similarly, 112 respondents favoured the chronological sequencing of English language learning skills in Q5, while Q6, with a response rate of 195 students, emphasized the assurance of English language usage across various professional fields in the future.

Questions Q7 to Q10 fall under the Types factor. Q7 received the highest response rate of 177 students, indicating a preference for selecting the most effective method to shape future language learning. For Q8, 165 respondents deemed it essential to identify the most useful language learning method. Q9, with a response rate of 158 students, highlighted the importance of selecting a suitable language learning method aligned with the present curriculum. Lastly, 148 respondents favored finalizing the best method to enhance English language learning performance in their institution in Q10.

The Methods category encompasses questions Q11 to Q15. Q11 received the highest response rate of 131 students, indicating a preference for choosing the most effective method to improve communicative skills. Q12, with a response rate of 219 students, emphasized the importance of framing effective learning activities. Q13 received the highest response rate of 236 students, suggesting a preference for better methodologies in English language classes. Q14, with a response rate of 200 students, underscored the admiration for effective teaching techniques and teacher performance. Finally, 230 respondents expressed their wish for staff monitoring and control in Q15.

Questions Q16 to Q18 are categorized under the Facilities factor. Q16 received the highest response rate of 236 students, indicating a significant usage of gadgets in daily life. For Q17, 175 respondents highlighted the importance of internet access in their areas. Lastly, 149 respondents conveyed the frequent usage of the Internet for learning purposes in Q18.

The final factor, Technology, comprises questions Q19 and Q20. Q19 received the highest response rate of 271 students, suggesting a strong emphasis on the role of technology in selecting language learning tools. Conversely, Q20, with a response rate of 107 students, indicated a lesser importance placed on preferences for teaching methods.
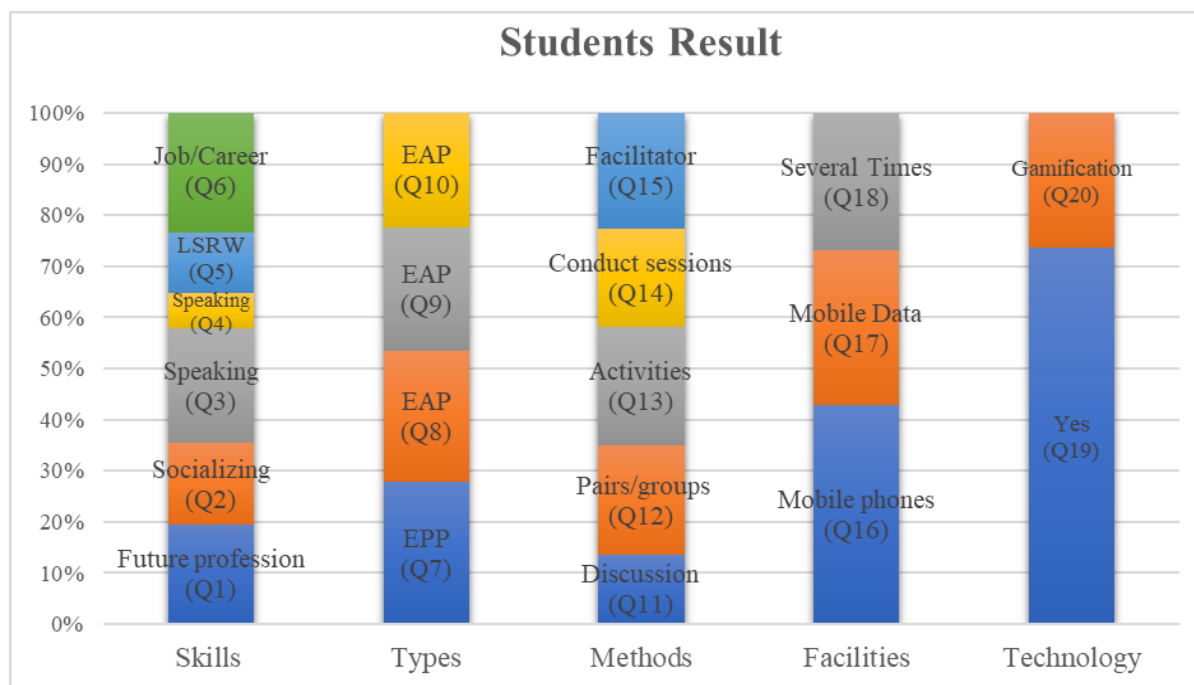

Figure 4. Cumulative response of Students

Figure 4 presents a cumulative response chart from students regarding various skill factors, with "Job and Career" emerging as the most highly rated aspect. This indicates that students place significant importance on acquiring skills that are directly relevant to their future Academic paths, reflecting a strong focus on career readiness. The high response rate for this factor suggests that students are increasingly aware of the competitive job market and the necessity of developing applicable skills to enhance their employability. In contrast, other skills received lower endorsements, highlighting a potential shift in educational priorities toward preparing students for their careers.

Overall, the chart emphasizes the critical role that career-oriented skills play in students' educational experiences and aspirations.
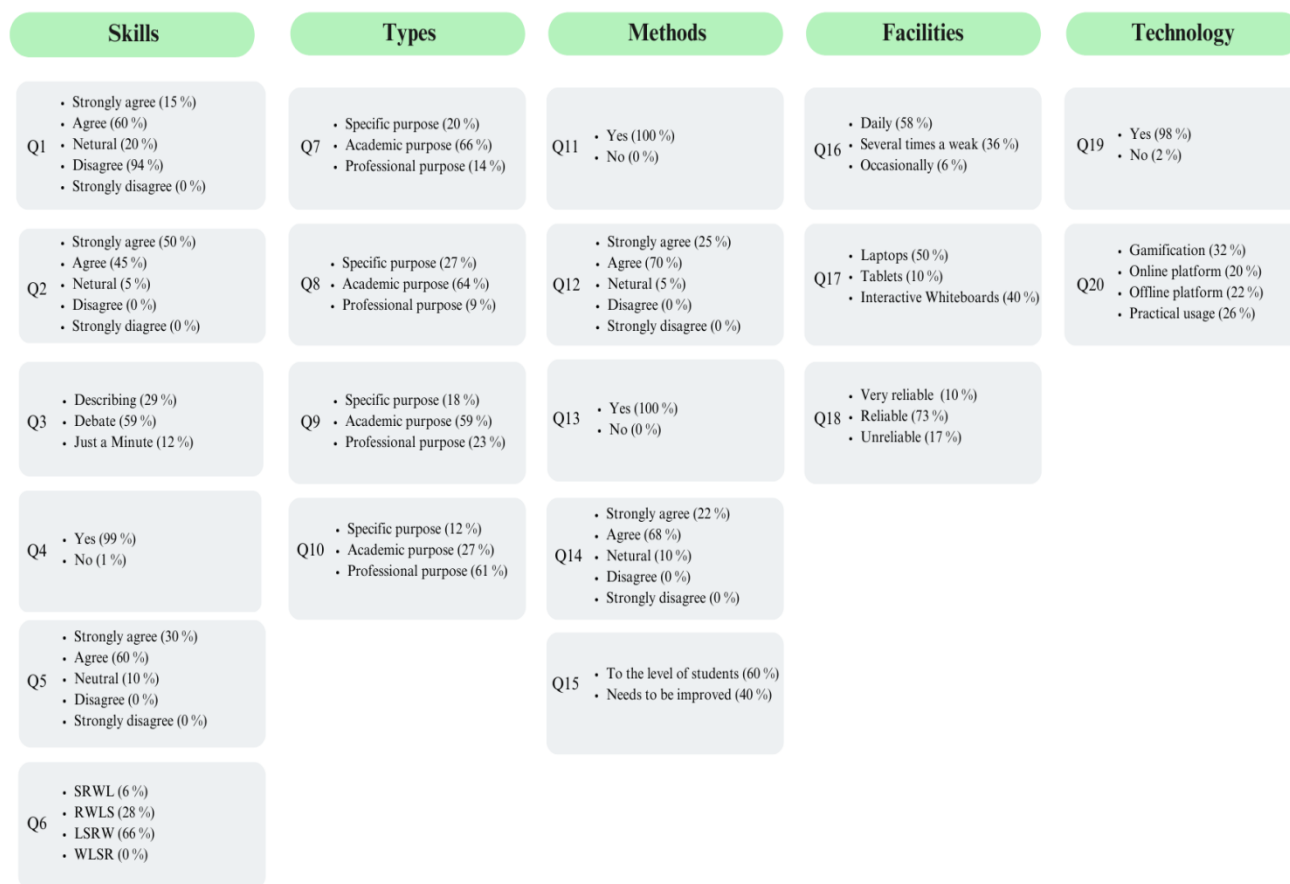
Figure 5. Percentage response of the Faculty

In Figure 5, questions Q1 to Q6 certain to the Skills factor. The highest response rate for Q1, at 60%, indicates a preference for fluency over accuracy in language proficiency. For Q2, 50% of respondents believe that the English syllabus should focus on developing all four skills equally. Q3 garnered the highest response rate of 59%, emphasizing the importance of enhancing students' communication skills. Q4 received a response rate of 99%, indicating overwhelming support for the adaptation of effective language-teaching skills. Similarly, 60% of respondents favored the role of the teacher as a facilitator for students in Q5, while Q6, with a response rate of 66%, showed a preference for teaching English skills in chronological order.

Questions Q7 to Q10 are categorized under the Types factor. Q7 received the highest response rate of 66%, indicating a consensus on achieving communication skills as the best purpose of education. For Q8, 64% of respondents believe that identifying valuable educational areas is crucial for enhancing language skills. Q9, with a response rate of 59%, highlights the importance of analyzing good support systems for teachers to improve language skills among learners. Lastly, 61% of respondents favored finding the most appropriate purpose in the teaching of higher education in Q10.

The Methods category encompasses questions Q11 to Q15. Q11 received a response rate of 100%, indicating unanimous agreement on the importance of making teaching relevant to real-life situations. For Q12, 70% of respondents favored a task-based teaching approach. Q13, with a response rate of 100%, underscores the necessity of training sessions for teachers to enhance language teaching skills. Q14 received a response rate of 68%, emphasizing the importance of active teacher participation in student learning. Finally, Q15, with a response rate of 60%, highlights the significance of pre-designing the curriculum.

Questions Q16 to Q18 fall under the Facilities factor. Q16 received the highest response rate of 58%, indicating the importance of technology usage and its role in teaching practices. Q17, with a response rate of 50%, emphasizes the need to assess the availability of technological resources. Lastly, Q18, with a response rate of 73%, highlights the importance of understanding the connectivity of the internet in the working environment.

The final factor, Technology, comprises questions Q19 and Q20. Q19 received the highest response rate of 98%, indicating strong support for using digital media to teach communication skills. Q20, with a response rate of 32%, indicates a lesser emphasis on the preference for teaching methods.
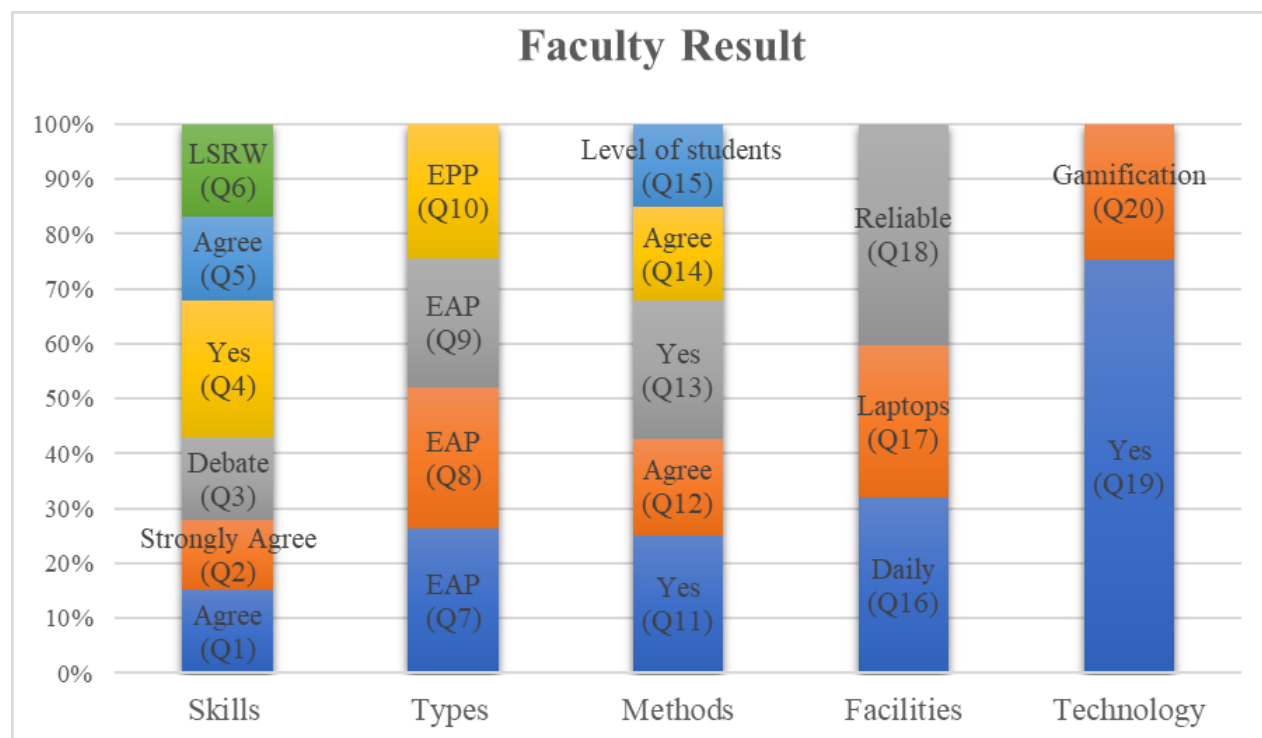
Figure 6. Cumulative response of faculty

Figure 6 illustrates the cumulative responses of students regarding various skill factors, with a clear emphasis on "LSRW," which received the highest response rate. This indicates that students prioritize skills that are directly relevant to their future professional aspirations, reflecting a strong focus on career readiness. Other skill factors received comparatively lower endorsements, suggesting that while they are acknowledged, they are not as critical to students as those linked to employment opportunities. The data highlights a growing awareness among students of the competitive job market and the importance of developing applicable skills to enhance their employability. Overall, the chart underscores the significance of career-oriented skills in shaping students' educational experiences and goals.
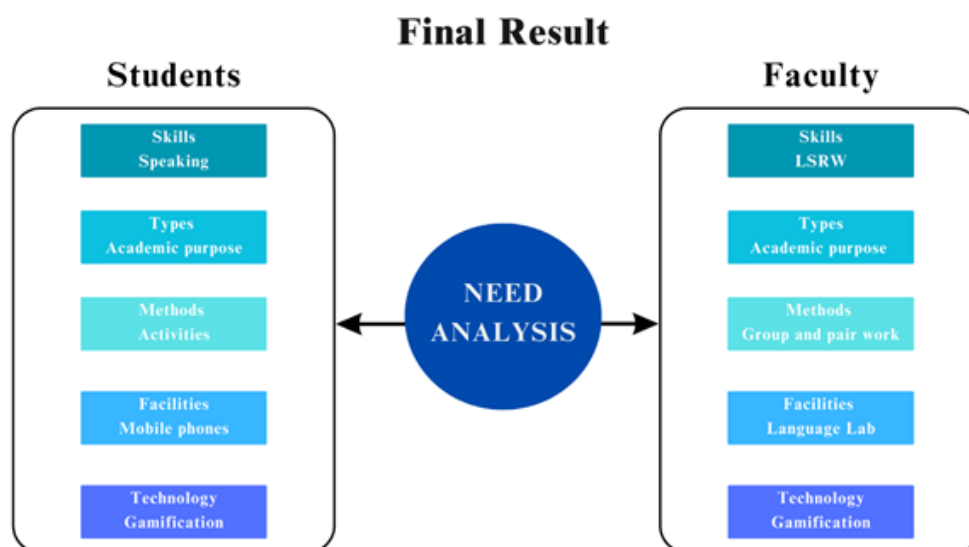

Figure 7. Summary of the findings

Figure 7 summary of the findings, illustrates the final result of a needs analysis conducted for both students and faculty members, highlighting key areas of focus. For students, the main skill identified is speaking, with the primary purpose being academic. The methods used for learning are activities, and the facilities available include mobile phones, with gamification as the key technology tool. On the other side, the faculty members focus on the four main language skills (LSRW: Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing) for academic purposes. The methods employed include group and pair work, with language labs being the primary facility. Like students, they also incorporate gamification in their technological approach. The central idea is that the needs of both groups are aligned through this analysis, ensuring that the educational objectives are met effectively using relevant tools and methods.

5. Discussion

The study also established the growing Importance and concern of the students and faculty in effectively teaching and learning English in Rural HEIs. It describes the skill base needed, the kind of methodologies used, the available resources, and the part that technology plays in student and faculty endeavors for adequate language mastery. The results of these challenges prove that there is a need to focus on intelligible intervention and support for improving the languages and methods used in the teaching and learning process (Wilson, Calongne, & Henderson, 2015).

The previous research on students' preparedness agreed with the need to have LSRW English proficiency skills for better academic performance (Dhivya, Hariharasudan, et al., 2024). However, many rural institutions are ill-equipped with infrastructure that complements language learning. The present study shows the need to increase students' level of English with a focus on their employment or career progression. In prior work conducted with faculty members, more concern was placed on effective communication skills for the development of students' academic and career purposes (Zhang & Zhang, 2024). The present study follows this by postulating that the faculty should focus on comprehensibility rather than discretion in communication. It pays much attention to the approaches used to teach language in response to the needs of the students.

Prior studies that have involved students have revealed different types of English proficiency, such as ESP, EAP, and EPP. However, educational institutions in rural areas have faced with several problems because of inadequate types of English language learning (Dhillon & Murray, 2021). The current study's results show a large research void in the attempt to improve the students' English, especially for academic purposes. In addition, previous research focusing on faculty members also stressed enhancing students' communication skills as a central aspect of their educational and career learning (Elbes & Oktaviani, 2022). On this basis, the present study underscores the potential of the faculty members in offering quality education transformation toward the enhancement of learners' academic language proficiency.

Previous research among students has highlighted the significance of various English learning methods using technology to effectively improve their communication skills. However, many rural institutions still face challenges due to insufficient infrastructure to support comprehensive language learning (Benesch, 2009). The current study's findings reveal a need to enhance students' English proficiency, particularly in preparing them using practical activities. Moreover, earlier studies involving faculty members have stressed the importance of equipping students with strong communication skills to facilitate their academic success and career growth (Rahmani, 2020). To address this, teachers should prioritize interactive learning strategies, such as role-playing, educational games, group work, and pair work, rather than relying solely on traditional lecture-based teaching where students passively listen (Araújo & Carvalho, 2022).

Prior work that has been conducted among the students has highlighted the need for various technologies as crucial determinants of communication enhancement in different aspects (Rahmani, 2020). However, a great portion of the rural institutions is still struggling due to poor infrastructures that prevent students from acquiring multiple aspects of language. The study established that there is a major student need for studies focusing on promoting learners' English language proficiency, particularly in the context of real-life academic practices. Additionally, earlier findings from faculty emphasized the importance of improving speech and language skills to support students' academic achievements (Qub'a et al., 2024). In line with this previous research, the current study points to the need for educational organizations to equip the teaching staff with technical knowledge for teaching the English language using new technology. It also stresses the fact that the instruction of language should be informed by students' needs.

Previous research among students has highlighted the crucial role of English proficiency in the global world (Putu Wulantari et al., n.d.). following the previous finding, the present study reveals the need for learning English through gamification to enhance students' language proficiency and engagement. Earlier studies involving faculty members have emphasized the importance of equipping students with digital media for strong communication skills (Huriati et al., n.d.). Building on these insights, the current study advocates for the integration of digital media in teaching communication skills, urging educators to leverage technology for more effective language instruction. Gamification, being the preferred teaching mode, is highlighted as a key approach to engage learners and improve their proficiency.

The unconventionality of this study lies in its comprehensive needs analysis conducted among both students and faculty members from higher education institutions in rural areas. This dual-perspective approach uniquely captures the specific challenges and requirements faced by these communities in terms of English language learning. The study's findings highlighted a critical gap in the provision of English for Academic Purposes (EAP), emphasizing the importance of integrating gamification technology as a solution to enhance student engagement and improve learning outcomes in rural educational settings. The novelty of the research is among the first to focus on the intersection of EAP and gamification within the rural higher education context.

6. Conclusion

Thus, the survey indicates a high awareness level among faculty members with a particular focus on the improvement of students' English language proficiency in higher education institutions in Tamil Nadu. This evidence unveils good academics and recognition of the importance of an innovative approach to thought-provoking teaching. However, the differences in the technology reveal the important item that should be improved. This must be achieved in the traditional sense by improving the current practices of modality as well as providing means for using technology by the faculty. Therefore, the following recommendations can be made based on the findings of the study. Institutions should focus on increasing the mean-variance portfolio of technological assets, like tablets and interactive whiteboards, to ensure a richer learning context to foster the use of multiple approaches to educating. This may require searching for grants or a partnership that could deal with such an area as educational technology. The recurring professional development related to the effective use of technologies in the teaching of language and presenting new ideas to enhance students' learning processes. Teaching and learning workshops and sessions can help faculty to better use technology in their teaching and learning interventions. Last of all, feedback procedures should be developed as a means for subsequent evaluation of the effectiveness of certain approaches and materials used in classes. This means that any weak areas can be recognized and fixed quickly, and therefore, there would be an enhancement in learning and teaching system flexibility to fit the dynamic environment of faculty and students.

Authors' Contributions

Ms. A. Pradheepa and Dr. K. Gurusamy conceptualized the study and guided the overall research design. Dr. T. Senthamarai and Dr. G. Coumaran were responsible for data collection and initial analysis. Dr. T. Pushpanathan drafted the manuscript and provided critical revisions. Dr. D. Sri Dhivya contributed to the literature review support and manuscript formatting. All authors read, reviewed, and approved the final version of the manuscript. All authors contributed equally to the study and agreed upon the authorship order.

Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Informed consent

Obtained.

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The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

Data sharing statement

No additional data are available.

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Appendix

1. The Need Analysis Questionnaire for Students

S.no	Questions	Options
	Learners **Skills (LSRW)**	
1.	Why do you need to study English?	a. Higher education b. Success for future profession c. Speak to foreigners d. Speak to friends and family
2.	When do you use English?	a. When studying b. When socializing c. At home d. Others
3.	Which of the following areas do you wish to develop more?	a. Speaking b. Listening c. Reading d. Vocabulary e. Writing f. Grammar
4.	Which skills are emphasized in the class?	a. Reading b. Grammar c. Vocabulary d. Writing e. Speaking f. Listening
5.	What chronological order would you prefer for the following skills?	a. Speaking, Reading, Writing, Listening b. Reading, Writing, Listening, Speaking c. Listening, Speaking, Reading, Writing d. Writing, Listening, Speaking, Reading
6.	In future, I shall be using English for	a. Higher education b. Job/career c. socializing d. At home e. Others
	Types of English	
7.	Which one do you believe would be most useful for you in shaping your future?	a. Specific purpose b. Academic purpose c. Professional purpose
8.	Which one would you think is most needed at this moment?	a. Specific purpose b. Academic purpose c. Professional purpose
9.	Which branch of purpose will be suitable for learning English in the current curriculum?	a. Specific purpose b. Academic purpose c. Professional purpose
10.	Which one of the following would you think will help you to improve your performance in an institution?	a. Specific purpose b. Academic purpose c. Professional purpose
	Learning Methods	
11.	Which learning methods do you find most effective for improving your communication skills?	a. Discussion b. Tutoring a. Activities b. Online c. Mixed
12.	How do you prefer to do learning activities?	a. Preference for working in pairs or groups b. Preference for working alone
13.	What kind of teaching methodology would you prefer in an English class?	a. A class with many activities, pair/group work, and projects b. Teaching only by the teacher & no activities by the students
14.	How do you want your teachers to perform:	a. To conduct engaging sessions b. To follow the traditional method
15.	What do you prefer your teacher to be like?	a. Preference for the role of teacher as a facilitator and guide

		b. Preference for the traditional role of the teacher as someone in control of everything in class
Facilities		
16.	What type of gadgets do you use in your day-to-day life?	a. Mobile phones b. Computers / Laptops c. Tablets
17.	How do you access the internet in your area?	a. Mobile Data b. Wi-fi c. Fixed–line broadband
18.	How often do you use the internet for learning?	a. Several times a day b. Once a day c. A few times in a weak d. Never
Technology		
19.	Technology gives you access to many language-learning tools.	a. Yes b. No
20.	Which method of language learning would you prefer:	a. Gamification b. Online platform c. Offline platform d. Practical usage

2. The Need Analysis Questionnaire for Faculty

Faculty **Skills (LSRW)**		
S.no	**Questions**	**Options**
1.	Teaching should focus on fluency rather than accuracy.	a. Strongly Agree b. Agree c. Neutral d. Disagree e. Strongly Disagree
2.	English syllabus should focus on developing all four skills.	a. Strongly Agree b. Agree c. Neutral d. Disagree e. Strongly Disagree
3.	Which activity would you think are used to enhance students' communication skills?	a. Describing b. Debate c. Just a Minute (JAM)
4.	Do teachers need to adopt the language teaching skills according to the specific needs of the learners?	a. Yes b. No
5.	Students should be at the center of knowledge transmission. A teacher should be their facilitator.	a. Strongly Agree b. Agree c. Neutral d. Disagree e. Strongly Disagree
6.	What chronological order of teaching English would you prefer for the following skills?	a. Speaking, Reading, Writing, Listening b. Reading, Writing, Listening, Speaking c. Listening, Speaking, Reading, Writing d. Writing, Listening, Speaking, Reading
Types of English		
7.	Which purpose do you believe serves the best for developing communication skills among students?	a. Specific purpose b. Academic purpose c. Professional purpose
8.	Where do you think teachers can find valuable education for improving the language skills of the learners?	a. Specific purpose b. Academic purpose

		c. Professional purpose
9.	Which one of the following supports teachers in helping students grasp their language learning skills?	a. Specific purpose b. Academic purpose c. Professional purpose
10.	Which purpose do you think is most appropriate for teaching English for higher education?	a. Specific purpose b. Academic purpose c. Professional purpose
Learning Methods		
11.	Should the teaching be based on real-life situations for better learning of the concepts?	a. Yes b. No
12.	What is your perspective on Task-based language teaching?	a. Strongly Agree b. Agree c. Neutral d. Disagree e. Strongly Disagree
13.	Do teachers need frequent training sessions to improve language teaching skills?	a. Yes b. No
14.	Teachers should spend a lot of time on role play/ games for learning/ group and pair work instead of just teaching and students only listening.	a. Strongly Agree b. Agree c. Neutral d. Disagree e. Strongly Disagree
15.	What are your thoughts on pre-designed language learning curricula in the present-day context?	a. To the level of students b. Needs to be improved
Facilities		
16.	How often do you use technology in your teaching practice?	a. Daily b. Several times a weak c. Occasionally
17.	What types of technology resources are available at your educational institution in your area?	a. Laptops b. Tablets c. Interactive Whiteboards
18.	How reliable is the internet connectivity in your Working environment?	a. Very reliable b. reliable c. unreliable
Technology		
19.	Should teachers use digital media for teaching communication skills?	a. Yes b. No
20.	Which method of teaching would you prefer:	a. Gamification b. Online platform c. Offline platform d. Practical usage