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Language Proficiency Development and Academic Performance:

A Critical Literature Review on the Effectiveness of Pre-sessional Programme

1. Introduction

1.1 Context

The necessity for evaluating the effectiveness of Higher Education (HE) Programmes stems from their critical role in shaping academic outcomes (Banerjee & Wall, 2006; Hyatt, 2013; Seviour, 2015). From a practical standpoint, 'Where does the urgency of assessment come from (Saunders et al., 2001)?' Such assessments are important for ensuring that educational initiatives meet their intended demands. For Chinese International students, this need is particularly pronounced. Their ability to thrive academically hinges on the capacity of preparatory courses, such as Pre-sessional Programmes (PSPs). Research indicates that approximately 10-15% of international students require participation in PSPs to meet language or academic entry requirements (British Council, 2023). As noted by Smith (2020), the success of international students often depends on how well these programmes prepare them for the goals of their academic environments. Similarly, Pearson (2020) emphasises that bridging these gaps is crucial for fostering academic achievement, long-term integration, and satisfaction. Thus, the urgency of assessment lies in its ability to validate and enhance the effectiveness of these preparatory efforts. Robust frameworks for academic literacy development have become particularly important, and PSPs have emerged as key transitional interventions. Based on a variety of theories, such as Bloom's Taxonomy of cognitive scaffolding (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001), English for Academic Purposes (EAP) has received increasing attention, but significant gaps in the research remain, with empirical evidence on the role of PSP in facilitating long term academic success. This review provides an overview of seminal theories (Hyland, 2016) and contemporary case studies of PSP, exploring one major paradox: the lack of longitudinal data tracking student performance after PSP. By combing through different databases, it prioritises peer-reviewed analyses from journals and other resources to critically assess how PSPs balance between Language Proficiency Outcome and Academic Performance Success. The findings aim to shed light on the effectiveness of PSP in response to theoretical gaps and the need for policymakers in the global education market (Hyatt, 2013; Seviour, 2015; Pearson, 2020).

1.2 Literature Review Process

1.2.1 Systematic Literature Screening Framework

Inclusion & Exclusion

Inclusion criteria were based on the presence of key terms such as **pre-sessional programme**, **framework effectiveness**, **language proficiency development**, **academic performance**, **Taxonomy** and **Challenge-Support-Readiness Model** in article titles, abstracts, and keywords, etc. Sources from **Google Scholar**, **Scopus**, and **CNKI** were prioritised due to their academic credibility. However, studies unrelated to EAP or higher education contexts were excluded.

Additionally, fuzzy matching techniques were employed to identify overlapping literature across different searches, ensuring the selection of consistently referenced materials.

A systematic approach was employed to refine the literature selection for this study. As seen in the ongoing search results, a significant number of studies were published after 2010, reinforcing the validity of this time frame. Given the increasing academic interest in PSP, particularly from 2015 onwards, the search period was adjusted from a twenty-year range to '2010–Present' to ensure relevance. **However, certain seminal works published prior to 2010 cannot be overlooked.**

Connotation

The term **pre-sessional programme (PSP)** explicitly refers to academic preparatory programmes designed to support students before their main degree courses (Hyland, 2006). However, its connotation varies across different studies. Some researchers emphasise **linguistic skill development** (Jordan, 1997), while others focus on **academic acculturation** (Wingate, 2015). This review synthesises these perspectives, where diverse keyword combinations yield different literature pools.

The selection process follows an **analysis-synthesis-evaluation** approach (Rodriguez & Toews, 2005). Breaking down existing research, it is found that most of the research on the effectiveness of PSP has focused on two areas and also the relation between: '**Language Proficiency & Academic Performance**', especially Atherton (2006) and Green (2007) argue PSP students often experience delayed degree completion or lower academic outcomes compared to students who entered degree programmes directly, which is regarded as an important issue in the literature review.

1.2.2 Process of Review

I conduct a PSP literature review using the CRAAP Test framework, critically assess sources' **Currency, Relevance, Authority, Accuracy, and Purpose**. This review analyses recent peer-reviewed studies, examining academic writing interventions' impact on pre-sessional students' outcomes, evaluating contextual relevance and methodological rigour to formulate targeted support frameworks while addressing identified research gaps (Hyland, 2016; Lea & Street, 1998; Li & Storch, 2022).

After the CRAAP Test examining the value of the literature, I selected more than 20 primary literature, and followed the process below: **Analysis** involves breaking down existing research into key themes, such as language proficiency outcomes, academic development feedback, and students' experiences. **Synthesis** then integrates findings, identifying common patterns and gaps in the literature. Finally, **Evaluation** critiques methodologies, highlighting strengths and weaknesses, and establishing cause-effect relationships between PSPs and academic success.

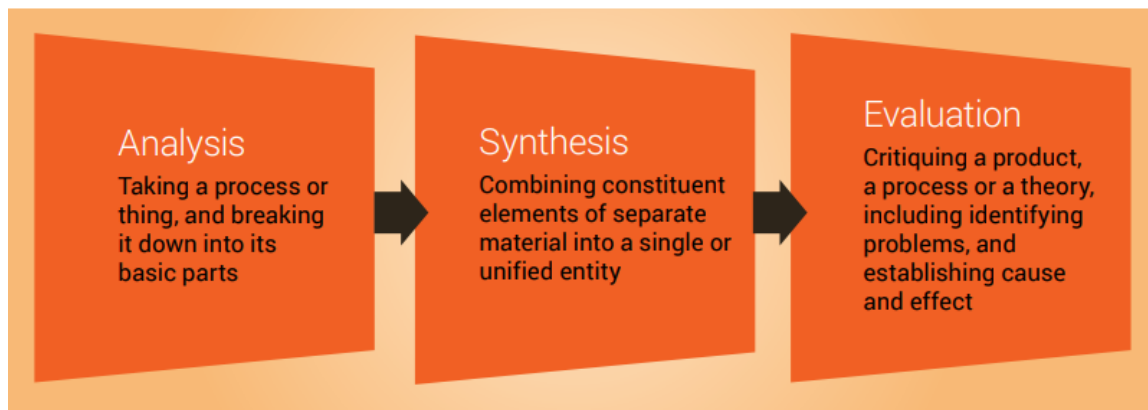


Figure 1: Cognitive skills required for writing a literature review.

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1.3 Research Objectives and Draft Research Questions

This review aims to investigate the effectiveness of PSPs in UK higher education through a multi-layered lens:

- To evaluate the interplay between the PSP learning environment and students' linguistic and academic outcomes.
- To examine how PSP course design balances competing priorities—stakeholder expectations, pedagogical strategies, and measurable skill gains.

I explore the '3E' priorities for objectives: to **Evaluate** stakeholder needs, to **Explore** adaptive teaching methods, to **Examine** the language-academic performance nexus.

Main Question:

How can the effectiveness of a PSP at a UK university be comprehensively evaluated, ensuring findings are generalisable across student cohorts and testing the sustainability of short-term outcomes in long-term academic contexts?

Sub-Questions:

- **To what extent does PSP participation enhance language proficiency?**
- **How does PSP-mediated language development correlate with academic performance in subsequent degree studies?**

1.4 Summary

This study employs a mixed-methods approach—triangulating quantitative metrics (pre-/post-programme language assessments) with qualitative insights (student as stakeholder interviews)—to evaluate the longitudinal efficacy of PSPs. Longitudinal cohort tracking tests skill sustainability, while comparative analysis across disciplines identifies contextual moderators. By integrating macro-level policy alignment, meso-level environmental factors, and micro-level curricular '3E' priorities (Evaluate, Explore, Examine), the research redefines PSP effectiveness through dual lenses of transferability and enduring impact, with the review of more than 20 pieces of primary literature.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

Because of globalisation, changes in language policy are reshaping research paradigms in the field of PSP research, with a central debate focusing on the synergy between language proficiency and academic development goals. While early research reduced language proficiency to standardised test scores (Graham,1987), contemporary scholarship has shifted towards a multidimensional notion of 'Mastery Goals' that emphasises the interplay of cognitive, sociocultural, and academic contexts (Douglas,2000; Bachman and Palmer, 2010). Through the theoretical lens of the Challenge-Support-Readiness Model (CSR) and Bloom's(2001) Taxonomy, this review systematically examines how the multidimensional construction of language proficiency dynamically balances the factors above, ultimately influencing the path to academic performance(Cummins,2008).

2.2 Key terms

2.2.1 Pre-sessional Programme (PSP)

English-medium universities have strategically adopted condensed preparatory courses emphasizing academic English proficiency development, which has significantly enhanced their competitive positioning within the international education sector by accommodating overseas applicants requiring linguistic skill enhancement prior to commencing degree studies (Westbrook and Holt, 2015; Pearson, 2020). Pre-sessional programme (PSP), recognised for fostering high standards of English linguistic proficiency and intercultural awareness, was first established as an academic research priority following the Higher Education Seminar convened by the Group for Special English Language Materials for Overseas University Students (SELMOUS) at the University of Manchester in April 1978. This seminar outlined the pedagogical objectives of PSPs, asserting their capacity to enable students to:

1. comprehend lectures and produce structured notes;
 2. compose academic essays, undertake examinations, and eventually draft a thesis;
 3. critically engage with voluminous academic literature;
 4. actively participate in seminars and collaborative discourse'
- (The British Council, 1978, p. 8).

These aims underscored the foundational emphasis on integrating linguistic mastery with intercultural competence. A seminal illustration of this approach was the PSP courses (1972 – 1977) administered by the Department of Education at the University of Manchester, which emerged as an early exemplar of such initiatives (The British Council, 1978).

By 2024, PSP have expanded to incorporate online modalities, exemplified by institutions such as the University of Southampton. Their virtual PSP model employs a Blended Teaching (BT) framework, enabling international learners to acclimate to the intellectual demands of UK HE while residing in their home countries. Participants undertake self-directed study via curated materials,

execute tasks across writing, reading, listening, and speaking domains, and engage in synchronous virtual seminars, peer collaboration forums, and pre-recorded instructional content (University of Southampton, 2024). Competency is evaluated through diverse methods, including time-constrained digital assessments and iterative coursework submissions, ensuring alignment with rigorous academic benchmarks (University of Southampton, 2024).

In conclusion, PSP is a short-term academic English course designed to enhance international students' reading, writing, speaking, and listening, to meet UK university entry requirements (Hyland, 2016; Murray, 2010; Ding & Bruce, 2017). They clarify the PSP programme using a process of elimination:

English as a Second Language (ESL) programme that focuses only on single-skill training are **excluded** (Lee & Subtirelu, 2015).

What is included in the study has to be programmes offered by HEIs for students with conditional offers of admission, thus **excluding** general English language development programmes offered by private language schools.

Only programmes that are intensive to English for Academic Purposes (EAP) are **included**, with the following characteristics: full-time mode of class delivery, fixed programme cycles and articulated degree programme start dates.

However, the following two types of programmes are excluded:

Programmes that require students to take credit/non-credit EAP courses as a condition for college progression or graduation (Clark and Ishida, 2005).

Programmes that require students to take EAP courses in conjunction with their major (Storch & Tapper, 2009).

2.2.2 Theory

For the study of PSP, the Challenge-Support-Readiness Model (CSR) and Bloom's Taxonomy reflects a dialectic tension between content (theoretical and contextual depth) and form (structural frameworks), as well as between performance (learner outcomes) and assessment (evaluative criteria).

2.2.2.1 Challenge-Support-Readiness Model & PSP

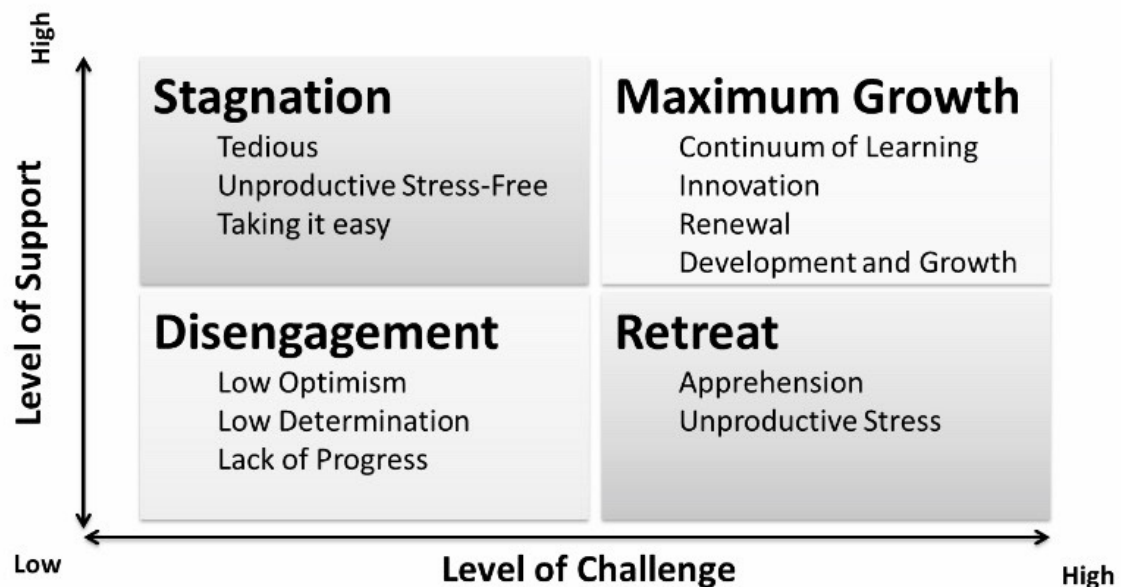


Figure 2: Challenge-Support-Readiness Model (Sanford, 1967).

Sanford's (1967) 'Challenge-Support-Readiness Model' is primarily used to explore how learners achieve personal growth and development in an environment that balances appropriate challenges and support (Sanford, 1967). In the context of PSPs, this model can help students transition smoothly into formal academic courses, enhancing their adaptability and academic success.

Challenge

Academic English proficiency: Guiding students in adapting to academic writing, critical reading, and listening requirements (Wingate, 2015).

Classroom participation: Enhancing students' performance in academic discussions, presentations, and group work (Arkoudis, Baik, & Richardson, 2012).

These challenges help students develop independent learning skills and prepare for formal coursework (Tinto, 1993).

Support

Instructor guidance: Regular feedback, one-on-one tutoring, and academic advising to help students adapt (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, & Whitt, 2011).

Peer support: Creating study groups and interactive classrooms to foster collaborative learning (Bailey, Jagers, & Jenkins, 2015).

Such support systems enhance students' confidence and enable them to better meet university academic expectations (Sanford, 1968).

Readiness

Readiness refers to whether students are prepared to take on challenges and effectively utilise the support available. PSPs should assess students' readiness and implement targeted strategies:

Initial assessment: Evaluating students' starting levels through language tests and learning goal analysis (Arkoudis et al., 2012).

Personalised learning plans: Designing individualized learning pathways based on students' proficiency (Tinto, 1993).

Developing independent learning skills: Using reflective journals and study strategy training to enhance students' self-regulation (Wingate, 2015).

The CSR Model (Hussain & Shen, 2019) presents several limitations in the context of PSP research:

- A Eurocentric bias in its preparation metrics, failing to adequately address high-context communication barriers among Asian students.

- Exclusion of the pandemic era - lacking validation in post-COVID studies for digital preparedness components (e.g., hybrid learning system adaptation).

In my research applying this model, I will advocate for the integration of momentary assessment to capture real-time fluctuations in challenge-support dynamics.

2.2.2.2 Bloom's Taxonomy in the Context of PSP Research

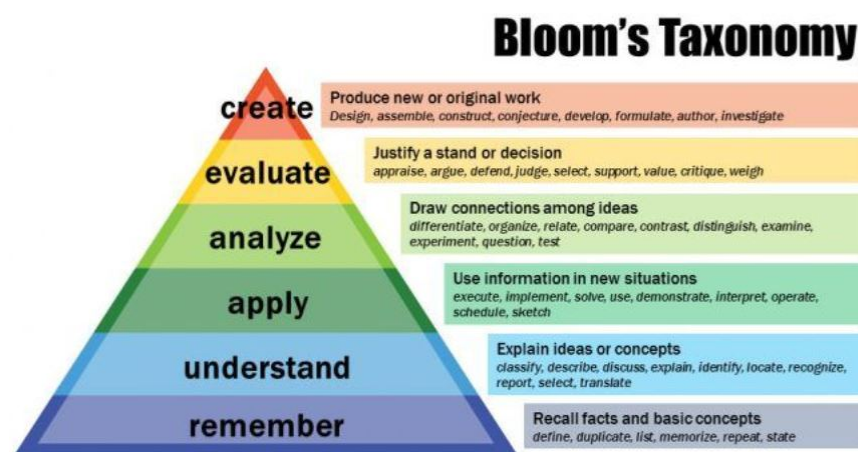


Figure 3: Bloom's Taxonomy (Vanderbilt University Center for Teaching, 2001).

The theoretical framework of Taxonomy (Bloom, 1956) can be applied here to assess how PSPs' structure learn to make progress from lower-phase cognitive skills (e.g., remembering language rules) to higher-phase skills (e.g., applying, and evaluating academic discourse). The combination of strong pedagogical knowledge and deep linguistic understanding enables teachers to construct learning trajectories that simultaneously address immediate language needs and long-term academic survival skills.

Bloom's Taxonomy provides the theoretical basis for the implementation of the PSP curriculum:

Cognitive Scaffolding: progressive development of analytical/evaluative skills in academic writing tasks using Bloom's Theory (Hyland, 2016).

Strategic Assessment: designing staged assessments that reflect PSP requirements and monitor language development.

Villegas (2021) indicates by structuring lower-order cognitive skills through the tiers of language proficiency, while concentrating higher-order cognitive tasks—such as application, analysis, evaluation, and creation—within the realm of academic performance, a more nuanced approach to competency assessment is achieved.

2.2.3 Language Proficiency in PSP

In PSP, language proficiency ensures academic readiness. Candidates require advanced English skills, particularly in academic writing, critical reading, and presentation delivery, tailored to university-level demands. (Hughes & Clarke, 2021; British Council, 2022).

Combined with the first two stages of Bloom's taxonomy, the definition considers cognitive development and critical thinking as core dimensions of language mastery.

Enhancing Engagement and Deep Learning (Phases 1 - REMEMBER - Cognitive Goals)

Bloom's underlying cognitive goal fits with the requirement for structured language acquisition in the PSP, which Banerjee and Wall (2006) define as 'the ability to use language effectively in academic tasks', such as integrating documentary sources or engaging in discipline-specific discussions. This requires going beyond surface language use to promote deeper learning - Pearson's (2020) research suggests that modular training can enhance grammatical accuracy and genre awareness.

Developing Critical Thinking and Creative Skills (Phases 2 - UNDERSTAND - Intellectual Goals)

Bloom's higher-order intellectual goals emphasise 'application' and 'analysis', echoing the role of critical thinking in language proficiency, and Hyatt (2013) criticises standardised tests such as IELTS for neglecting 'authentic academic problem-solving (Hyatt, 2013)', arguing that matriculation programmes should prioritise the design of tasks that require students to evaluate arguments, propose solutions and express original ideas. This is in line with Seviour's (2015) assessment framework: language proficiency is not only measured by linguistic accuracy, but also by the ability to 'construct logically coherent arguments based on evidence' (Seviour, 2015). Classroom activities such as debates on disciplinary issues or peer review of essays reflect Bloom's emphasis on 'synthesis' and 'evaluation' to stimulate creativity while bridging language skills and academic needs.

2.2.4 Academic Performance in PSP

Academic performance in the PSP, defined as a combination of language proficiency, academic skills, and disciplinary readiness (Banerjee & Wall, 2006; Hyatt, 2013), can be further parsed through the lens of Bloom's Taxonomy in terms of the cognitive and affective dimensions of learning objectives. Bloom's theoretical framework provides a structured perspective for analysing how teaching strategies can enhance students' resilience to higher education.

Personalised Learning (Phases 3 - APPLY):

Bloom's affective goal of 'demonstrating individuality' emphasises attention to students' emotional needs and individual differences, echoing Hyatt (2013) argument that academic success is dependent on learner adaptability and prior knowledge. By tailoring teaching to different linguistic and cultural contexts (Seviour, 2015), the Foundation Programme enhances student engagement and self-confidence, which is essential for long-term academic performance.

Reorganisation of classroom time (Phases 4 and 5 - ANALYSE & EVALUATE):

Bloom's focus on academic skills development aligns with the reorganisation of classroom activities, for example prioritising the development of academic writing (Seviour, 2015). The approach enhances motivation and effectiveness, directly supporting the acquisition of skills such as argumentation and citation (Banerjee and Wall, 2006).

Filling the Research Gap (Phase 6- CREATE):

Bloom's higher-order cognitive goal of 'creation' intersects with Pearson (2020) focus on differences in institutional language proficiency standards. By encouraging students to identify and connect to research gaps within their disciplines, the matriculation programme fosters analytical thinking and originality, thereby bridging preparatory training with academic success.

2.2.5 Summary

CSR and Taxonomy provide a structural framework for PSP from distinct dimensions. In my research, I will organically integrate these two theoretical paradigms within a mixed-methods methodological synthesis. By establishing a mapping equation between taxonomy and mixed-methods research (MMR), a bidirectional verification mechanism is enabled, combining quantitative assessment with qualitative analysis. This approach induces a 'logical inversion' effect in the relationship between language proficiency and academic performance, allowing the proportional modeling framework to accommodate 80-90% of PSPs. In summary, language Proficiency and academic performance in PSPs are defined through a combination of process-oriented indicators and outcome-oriented measures. In the next part, the themes of my research, I will explore further the bullet points mentioned above.

2.3 Main Themes

2.3.1 Research on Student Perceptions on PSP Effectiveness

2.3.1.1 Surface Effectiveness of Programme Versus Deeper

Contradictions

Atherton (2006) conducted a comparative study of 125 undergraduate and postgraduate students at one University in London during the 12-, 8-, and 4-week programme. The study used data

generated from assessment and concluded that the PSP was successful due to a high progression rate (including 41 students who had previously been identified as failing to meet the qualification of PSP) but poor assessment scores (four postgraduate students failed). Follow-up questionnaires distributed five months after students had completed their degrees (although only 24 students returned) showed that students were satisfied with PSP, but worryingly, 14 students expressed concerns about their coping skills. The author therefore, emphasised that for many students with marginal English language skills, the successful outcome of PSP was linked to an important issue about the need to continue to work on developing language skills with the support of the institution. According to Green's (2007) data, regarding short-term progress in language proficiency, students reported that writing skills are underdeveloped in terms of disciplinary appropriateness, although they had improved in dimensions such as lexical complexity (+10%) and nominalisation (+23%) .

Thorpe et al. (2017) undertook a seminal investigation into the longitudinal academic trajectories of PSP completers relative to peers admitted via direct language proficiency benchmarks and native-speaking cohorts. Their analysis encompassed institutional data from a comprehensive southern UK university cohort, incorporating 4,342 non-native English speakers (NNES) enrolled across undergraduate and postgraduate disciplines. Utilising multivariate regression modelling, the study positioned PSP participation as a primary predictor variable to isolate its influence on outcomes such as degree classification, module pass rates, and dissertation resubmission frequency. Their quantitative data showed a case of PSP in one university in the UK, with 84-96% course pass rates, but with a large 'borderline pass' group. 49-54% of alumni required degree extensions or dissertation retake and had an average GPA of 3-7 points lower than directly admitted international students.

Reviewing the above studies, it should not be taken for granted that PSP alumni have invested time and financial resources in their English language skills whilst pursuing their higher education programmes. Atherton's (2006) research highlighted that by adopting a variety of operationalised methods of academic success, it is possible to gain more nuanced insights. However, as with Martala's (2006) study, it is unclear whether students with learning difficulties were to achieve ultimate academic success as students were not followed up to obtain degree outcome information. Twenty years after their studies, I hope that my research will provide an answer to their refined questions.

2.3.1.2 Multidimensional Impact of PSP on Student Academic Performance

Research on PSP highlights their dual role in facilitating academic transition while exposing systemic pedagogical limitations. Dooley's (2010) qualitative analysis of an Australian English for PSP course, involving interviews with 13 culturally diverse students, revealed that 78% perceived benefits in academic adaptation (e.g., literature analysis). However, structural shortcomings emerged: 83% lacked disciplinary authenticity in writing tasks, and 23% of mixed-ability learners reported mismatched pacing. Cultural-specific challenges were more evident, with 47% of

Chinese students adhering to formulaic writing templates and 61% of postgraduates favouring native-language peer interactions during cross-cultural discussions (Copland et al., 2011), underscoring tensions between PSP utility and contextual relevance.

Expanding this critique, Bailey and Carroll's (2020) longitudinal multi-institutional study (N=1,247) identified weak correlations ($r=0.32$) between PSP scores and degree performance, attributing discrepancies to a 'pass-rate illusion' (inflated PSP outcomes) and an 'academic writing trap' (generic assessments misaligning with critical thinking demands). Their findings challenged prior assumptions of PSP efficacy (e.g., Seviour, 2015), proposing discipline-specific simulations and a dual-rating system to separately evaluate linguistic proficiency and academic rigour. This framework prioritised context-driven skill development over rote language mastery, addressing gaps between preparatory training and degree-level expectations.

Complementing these insights, Villegas (2021) examined flipped learning (FL) through constructivist and self-determination theory (SDT) lenses in a mixed-methods study of 90 Chinese PSP learners. While 76.7–83% associated FL with enhanced autonomy through interactive tasks, 31.1% reported cognitive overload and technical barriers (e.g., internet restrictions). Quantitative analysis emphasised competence (CET) as a key engagement driver ($M=1.19\pm0.42$), suggesting FL's success hinges on balancing structured guidance with learners' self-efficacy perceptions, particularly in high-context environments where cultural and technological constraints converge.

Methodologically, Bailey and Carroll's (2020) large-scale quantitative design enhances generalisability, contrasting with Dooley (2010)'s culturally nuanced qualitative approach and Villegas (2021)' motivation-centric SDT analysis. Thematically, all studies critique PSPs' overreliance on generic tasks but diverge in solutions: Bailey advocates assessment restructuring (e.g., dual-rating systems), whereas Villegas stresses pedagogical equilibrium between autonomy and scaffolding. Dooley(2010) and Villegas(2021) further identify context-specific barriers, template dependency and digital access issues, that perpetuate equity gaps. Collectively, these findings argue for PSP models integrating disciplinary authenticity, culturally responsive design, and psychologically informed pedagogy to improve predictive validity and equitable academic outcomes.

All the authors addressed curriculum-expectation mismatches through contextualised discipline-specific tasks, mitigated cultural-technological barriers, and resolved motivational paradoxes via psychologically informed design, which will help my research with synthesising pedagogical, contextual, and motivational dimensions from prior PSP research.

2.3.2 Research on Language Proficiency Development

Language proficiency development has been a key area of inquiry in applied linguistics, particularly for academic performance and second language (L2) acquisition. Theoretical frameworks such as Bloom's Taxonomy, and the Model of Challenges, Supports and Readiness (CRS), in determining academic adaptation outcomes provide further insights into how PSPs facilitate language development.

2.3.2.1 Language Standards and Assessment

Allwright and Banerjee (1997), Archibald (2001), and van Beuningen, de Jong, and Kuiken (2012) explore different dimensions of language assessment and development, particularly on the issues of university admissions and L2 writing. Allwright and Banerjee (1997) critique the reliability of standardised language tests in predicting students' academic success, pointing out that these tests often fail to measure the nuanced competencies required in academic settings. Archibald (2001) extends this discussion by analysing the long-term development of L2 writing proficiency, revealing that while structural and organisational improvements occur over time, grammatical accuracy remains a persistent issue. Complementing this, van Beuningen et al. (2012) find that while direct error correction improves linguistic accuracy, its long-term effects remain uncertain. Taken together, these studies highlight the limitations of conventional assessment methods and instructional strategies in fully preparing students for degree programmes. PSPs may serve as a more adaptive solution, offering structured support beyond traditional testing and feedback models. However, the effectiveness of PSPs in addressing these long-term challenges remains an open question, necessitating further research on how these programmes can enhance both immediate and sustained language development.

2.3.2.2 Second Language(L2) Writing Development

Archibald (2001) investigates the long-term evolution of L2 writing proficiency, highlighting the importance of sustained practice and targeted intervention. The research indicates that while students exhibit gradual improvements in coherence and structure, grammatical accuracy remains a persistent challenge. While this study provides valuable insights into L2 writing progression, it does not fully address how different instructional methods impact development. PSPs often incorporate academic writing components to help students transition into university writing expectations. However, it is to be discussed whether these short-term interventions lead to sustained improvements in writing proficiency beyond the programme's duration. Liu and Brown's (2015) meta-analysis suggests that the efficacy of feedback varies depending on learners' cognitive engagement and instructional context. While the meta-analysis provides a broad overview, it does not account for socio-cultural differences that may affect feedback reception. Hyland (2008) expands on this by examining discourse features of academic writing, particularly focusing on disciplinary variations in vocabulary use. The study argues for a more genre-sensitive approach to EAP instruction, advocating for explicit teaching of discipline-specific conventions. PSPs cater to diverse student populations, and understanding how feedback is interpreted across different educational contexts could provide more actionable insights for refining PSP curricula.

In my perspective, it is important to raise questions about the sustainability of corrective feedback effects. Many PSPs attempt to address disciplinary writing needs, yet a universal approach is not effective. More applied research on PSP pedagogical implementation is necessary to ensure students are adequately prepared for writing within their respective disciplines. The other PSPs emphasise feedback-driven writing development, but whether students retain these improvements post-programme is unclear. Future research should examine how feedback

processing differs among PSP students and whether metacognitive training can enhance retention of corrections.

2.3.2.3 Writing Development and Corrective Feedback

Liu and Brown (2015), and Hyland (2008) contribute to the discourse on academic writing and corrective feedback, particularly in relation to vocabulary acquisition and disciplinary writing. Liu and Brown (2015) conduct a meta-analysis on corrective feedback strategies, concluding that effectiveness depends heavily on learners' cognitive engagement and the instructional context. In conclusion, these studies suggest that writing development is a complex, multifaceted process that requires more than just surface-level corrections. PSPs address these issues by integrating corrective feedback with structured vocabulary and discourse instruction. However, a critical challenge remains, while PSPs provide intensive short-term training, students may struggle to transfer these skills into their specific academic disciplines. However, future research should explore how PSP can be tailored to facilitate long-term retention and application of writing skills in varied disciplinary contexts.

Mazgutova (2015) investigates cognitive and linguistic growth in PSP students, linking curriculum design to academic writing development. The study highlights that while PSP courses improve structural proficiency, deeper cognitive engagement with texts is necessary for long-term success. This aligns with the theory of Taxonomy, where students should be given the time and resources to fully grasp and integrate feedback before progressing to more complex writing tasks. PSPs often integrate writing activities, but there is limited research on how well these interventions translate into independent academic success. Further exploration of autonomous vocabulary learning strategies within PSPs could significantly enhance students' writing development beyond classroom instruction.

2.3.3 Research on Academic Performance

The value of PSPs on students' academic performance needs more focus on the issues of programme effectiveness, skill transferability, and long-term academic success. This review critically evaluates key contributions to this domain.

2.3.3.1 PSP Design and Assessment

Contemporary PSP design research emphasises three core principles: disciplinary alignment, scaffolded transitions, and technological integration. Empirical studies demonstrate that discipline-specific approaches yield superior outcomes compared to generic PSP models (Charles, 2018). Previous research has provided significant empirical support in examining the applicability of Taxonomy and related theories to the continuously evolving design of PSP projects. Atherton (2006), Banerjee and Wall (2006), and Bradshaw (2004) explore different aspects of PSP design, focusing on balancing programme demands, evaluating assessment validity, and understanding the

impact on international students. Atherton (2006) highlights the risks of overloading students with linguistic and academic demands, while Banerjee and Wall (2006) point out inconsistencies in PSP evaluation tools that may not align with real academic challenges. Bradshaw (2004) underscores the variability in students' ability to transfer skills gained in PSPs to postgraduate study. Collectively, these studies suggest that while PSPs are essential for academic preparation, their effectiveness is highly dependent on curriculum design, assessment alignment, and students' adaptability. Future research should explore how to optimise the PSP structure to ensure long-term skill retention in the context of the classical theories described above.

2.3.3.2 Impact on Academic Performance

Integrating Bloom's Taxonomy and the CSR Framework can enhance pedagogical efficacy. Bloom's hierarchical objectives scaffold cognitive development from foundational skills to advanced tasks, reducing 'academic shock' (Dimova, Yan and Ginther, 2020).

Storch and Tapper (2009), Crosthwaite (2016), and Thorpe et al. (2017) examine PSPs' impact on students' academic writing and overall performance. Storch and Tapper (2009) argue that collaborative writing tasks enhance students' ability to construct arguments, while Crosthwaite (2016) finds that PSP writing courses improve coherence but do not always lead to sustained long-term improvement. Thorpe et al. (2017) reinforce the idea that while PSPs benefit non-native speakers, long-term success is contingent on continued language support. These studies collectively highlight a crucial issue - PSPs provide an initial foundation, but without ongoing reinforcement, students may struggle to maintain their academic language proficiency. Institutions must consider embedding continued language support mechanisms to ensure long-term academic success for PSP graduates.

2.4 Summary

Through systematic analysis of PSP with Bloom's Taxonomies and CSR frameworks, common thematic patterns emerged from synthesised literature. Interrogating foundational works (e.g., Atherton, 2006; Green, 2007) to latest research (e.g., Bailey and Carroll, 2020) alongside Villega's (2021) doctoral thesis etc. revealed critical tensions between language proficiency benchmarks and academic performance metrics across diverse contexts. By employing a diachronic, cross-regional comparative lens, this study challenges entrenched assumptions in PSP design, particularly the oversight of sociocultural and technological variables in earlier models. It delineates novel research trajectories at the intersection of pedagogical efficacy and programme accountability.

3.Conclusion

3.1 Summary of Common Themes

Existing literature reveals consistent patterns in evaluating pre-sessional programmes (PSPs). Quantitative analyses indicate that while most PSP students complete courses with measurable language gains, improvements often lack statistical significance (Archibald, 2001; Green, 2007). A concerning proportion transition to degree studies with borderline proficiency, leading to academic setbacks such as deferrals or underperformance (Atherton, 2006; Ridley, 2006). Qualitatively, students perceive PSPs as confidence-building yet question their direct impact on academic outcomes (Dooey, 2010). Mixed-methods research highlights associations between writing skill development and self-efficacy, though longitudinal evidence remains scarce (Mazgutova, 2015). Methodologically, critiques centre on insufficient long-term tracking and control group design flaws (Thorpe et al., 2017). Policy discussions advocate transparent marketing to manage expectations and stress the need for robust academic support systems (Seviour, 2015). From the student's perspective, there remain numerous pressing issues in PSP Design and Assessment as well as Language Standards and Assessment. These challenges must be addressed to unveil the underlying tensions between PSP language proficiency and academic performance.

3.2 Identified Gaps

Three critical gaps were found. Firstly, longitudinal data on PSP outcomes are strikingly limited: no studies track career trajectories beyond three years post-completion, and only one examines discipline-specific skill transfer (Storch & Tapper, 2009). Secondly, research inadequately addresses regional and structural variations—e.g., disparities between Welsh, Scottish, and English PSP models, or the efficacy of extended foundation programmes with lower entry thresholds (IELTS 4.0). Thirdly, the evolving pedagogical landscape, particularly AI-driven curriculum adaptations and distance learning frameworks (Harker & Koutsantoni, 2005), remains underexplored. Additionally, existing studies fail to reconcile the tension between short-term language metrics and long-term academic competence, underscoring the need for cross-institutional datasets and policy reforms (Pearson, 2020).

3.3 Refined Research Questions

To address these gaps, this study proposes an additional **Primary Question**: How does language proficiency acquired from PSPs contribute to academic success during and beyond degree programmes?

Refined-Questions(optional):

-To what extent do regional differences (e.g., PSP in Wales vs. PSP in England) and programme durations (e.g., one-year foundation courses) moderate PSP effectiveness?

-How might AI-integrated and blended learning models, based on traditional theory (CSR and Taxonomy, etc.) reshape PSP to address emerging academic demands and enhance the effectiveness of PSP outcome evaluations?

This review aims to adopt a comprehensive perspective in analyzing comparative data through a national and international tracking system for evaluating effectiveness. By implementing such a framework, we seek to expand the scope of investigative pathways while enhancing methodological rigor in addressing core research questions and their subsidiary inquiries. The PSP validation research field remains substantially underdeveloped, requiring systematic longitudinal analysis to bridge current knowledge gaps. Furthermore, this review will adopt a dynamic framework that continuously incorporates emerging data patterns, pedagogical advancements, and evolving educational benchmarks, ensuring its findings remain current with global academic development.

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