

NEEDS ANALYSIS AND COURSE DESIGN

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ABSTRACT

Identifying learner needs is essential in English course design. Needs Analysis or Needs Assessment refers to an array of procedures for identifying and validating the learner needs and establishing priorities among them. Learner needs can be categorized into learning needs and target needs. Target needs comprise necessities, lacks, and wants. Course designer uses a number of ways such as questionnaire, interview, observation, and the like to collect information about learner needs. Needs Analysis has two categorizes of purposes; first, it is related to course design or curriculum development, and second, it is concerned with language teaching.

Key words: *Needs Analysis, Target Needs, Course Design, and Course Design Process.*

1. Introduction

In English teaching-learning process, learners have different needs and interest. Their needs and interests are influenced by their educational, social or economical background, and their purpose of learning English. Some learners have their own concern with academic needs, others have job needs; other group of learners have needs in learning English for their occupational requirements and/or vocational training program. From time to time the learners' needs always change and develop as the development of science and technology.

Together with their attitudes to English learning, student needs and interests will influence their motivation in their learning. If they have motivation in their learning, whether intrinsic or extrinsic, integrative or instrumental, they will be able to learn English effectively and efficiently. The English course in terms of its objectives, materials, techniques and media, and evaluation that is relevant to the learners'

needs and interests is paramount to make the English teaching-learning process better and faster.

Identifying the learners' needs becomes essential in designing English course. In other words, English course designer should conduct needs analysis of the learner. Needs Analysis (NA) can be carried out before and after designing English course. Before designing English course, NA can be the starting point for devising courses, syllabuses, teaching-learning content, and the kind of teaching-learning process that takes place (Jordan, 1997: 22). After designing English course, NA can be one of the curriculum development processes in the sense that NA refers to an array of procedures for identifying and validating needs and establishing priorities among them (Richards, 1997: 1). In addition, NA is intended to guide for the renewal of curriculum or to evaluate the existing curriculum.

The main concern of this paper is to verify the notion of Needs Analysis and other approaches incorporated under the umbrella of Needs Analysis, four philosophies and fundamental questions of Needs Analysis, needs and kinds of needs, the procedures of gathering information about learners' needs, the purpose of Needs Analysis, the users of Needs Analysis, the notion of course design, course design process, and approach to course design.

2. The Notion of Needs Analysis

Historically, needs analysis was formerly introduced to English Language Teaching (ELT) in the development and movement of the teaching of English for Specific Purposes (ESP). From the 1960's the demand for specialized language program grew rapidly and applied linguists increasingly began to employ needs analysis procedures in language teaching. By the 1980's, in many parts of the world a "needs-based philosophy" in language teaching, particularly in relation to ESP and vocationally oriented program design (Richards, 2002: 51).

Needs Analysis is also called Needs Assessment and it can be understood in general terms and in more formal terms. In general terms, Needs Analysis refers to the activities involved in gathering information that will serve as the basis for developing a curriculum that will meet the learning needs of a particular group of students. Once identified, needs can be stated in terms of goals and objectives which, in turn, can serve as the basis for developing materials, teaching activities, evaluation strategies, as well as for reevaluating the precision and accuracy of the original needs assessment (Brown, 1995: 35). In more general terms, Needs Analysis as proposed by Richards, Platt, and Weber (in Brown, 1995: 35) is the process of determining the needs for which a learner or a group of learners require a language and arranging the needs according to priorities. In more operational terms, Pratt (in Brown, 1995: 36) states that Needs Assess-

ment refers to an array of procedures for identifying and validating, and establishing priorities among them.

Brown and Richards use the terms Needs Analysis and Needs Assessment interchangeably. Brown (1995: 36) states that Needs Analysis or Needs Assessment refers to the systematic collection and analysis of all subjective and objective information necessary to define and validate defensible curriculum purposes that satisfy the language learning requirements of the students within the context of particular institutions that influence the learning and teaching situation. Richards, *et al.* (1985: 189) define Needs Analysis or Needs Assessment as the process of determining the needs for which a learner or group of learners requires a language and arranging the needs according to priorities. Furthermore they point out that Needs Assessment makes use of both subjective and objective information (e.g. data from questionnaire, test, interview, observation) and seeks to obtain information on: (a) the situations in which a language will be used (including *who* it will be used *with*), (b) the objectives and purposes for which the language is needed, (c) the types of communication that will be used (e.g. written, spoken, formal, informal), (d) the level of proficiency that will be required.

3. Approach to Needs Analysis

In the development of Needs Analysis, some approaches are adopted. Among the best known approaches, according to Jordan (1997 : 23-9) are Target-situation Analysis (TSA), Present-situation Analysis (PSA), Deficiency Analysis (DA), Learning-centered Approach (LCA), Strategy Analysis (SA), Means Analysis (MA), and Language Audits (LA).

3.1 Target-situation Analysis (TSA)

TSA is the rigorous model devised by Munby (1978) that focuses on the students'

needs at the end of a language course, and target-level performance. According to Nunby (in Nunan, 1997: 19-20) target situation analysis contains nine elements:

- (1) *participant* that includes the learner's identity, language skills, age, sex, nationality, mother tongue, command of target language, other languages, etc.,
- (2) *purposive domain* that refers to the purposes for which the target language is required,
- (3) *setting*, the environment in which the target language will be employed,
- (4) *interaction* which refers to the people with whom the learner will be interacting,
- (5) *instrumentality*, the medium (spoken or written, receptive or productive), the mode (monologue or dialogue, to be heard or read), and the channel (face-to-face or indirect),
- (6) *dialect* (variety),
- (7) *target level* that deals with degree of mastery,
- (8) *communicative event* which refers to the productive and receptive skills, and
- (9) *communicative key*, the personal attitudes and tones.

3.2 Present-Situation Analysis (PSA)

PSA ascertains the students' state of language development at the beginning of language course.

3.3 Learning-Centered Approach (LCA)

LCA involves learning as a process of negotiation between individual and society which includes teaching, syllabus, methods, materials, etc.

3.4 Deficiency Analysis (DA)

DA tries to analyze the gap between the target proficiency and what the learner knows already.

3.5 Strategy Analysis (SA)

SA observes not only methods of teach-

ing, but also methods of learning. In other words, it observes the preferred learning styles and strategies of the students. In this respect the development of learner autonomy become important.

3.6 Means Analysis (MA)

It is the attempt to adapt language courses to local situations; in other words, to accommodate what are frequently seen to be "constraints", e.g. cultural attitudes, resources, materials, equipment, methods.

3.7 Language Audits (LA)

Language audits are large-scale exercises in defining language needs carried out for companies, regions, or countries. They provide data and may propose training or educational policies to be implemented over a period of time.

Richards (1997: 2) points out that Needs Analysis may focus on either the general parameters of a language program or on the specific communicative needs of language learners. Compared to Jordan's, he proposes two approaches in this matter. The first approach is *situation analysis* and the second approach is *communicative needs analysis*. The first approach involves focusing on questions such as: Who are the learners?, What are the learners' goals and expectation?, What learning styles do the learners prefer?, How proficient are the teachers in the target language?, Who are the teachers?, What training and experience do the teachers have? What teaching approach do they favor? What do the teachers expect of the program? What is the administrative context of the program?, What constraints (e.g. time, budget, resources) are present?, What kinds of tests and assessment measures are needed? The second approach involves questions such as these; In what setting will the learners use the target language?, What roles relationships are involved?, Which language modalities are involved (e.g. reading, writing, listening, speaking)?, What types

of communicative events and speech acts are involved?, What level proficiency is required?. Answer to these questions help determine the type of language skills and level of proficiency the program should aim to deliver.

Nunan (1997: 14-8) points out that, broadly speaking, there are two different types of needs analysis used by language syllabus designer; learner analysis and tasks analysis. Learner analysis is based on information about the learner (e.g. age, education, socioeconomic background, kinds, motivation, demography, habits, learning styles and strategy and types). Tasks analysis is employed to specify and categorize the language skills required to carry out real world tasks, and often follows the learner analysis which establishes the communicative purposes for which the learner wishes to learn the language.

4. Four Philosophies and Fundamental Questions of Needs Analysis

According to Stufflebeam, McCor-mick, Brinkerhoff & Nelson (in Brown, 1995: 38-9) four divergent philosophies can arise in a need analysis: The discrepancy, the democratic, the analytic and the diagnostic. It is very important to understand these philosophies because of the fact that they will affect the type of information that will be gathered from the respondents. *The Discrepancy Philosophy* is one in which needs are viewed as differences, or discrepancies, between desired performance from the students and what they are actually doing. This might lead to gathering detailed information about what is needed to change the students' performance or the students' abilities in academic English based on the observed difference. *The Democratic Philosophy* is one in which a need is defined as any change that is desired by a majority of the group involved (e.g. the students themselves, their teachers, program administrators, or the owner of private, for-profit language school). This philosophy leads to a needs analysis that

would gather information about the learning most desired by the chosen group (s).

In *the analytic philosophy*, a need is whatever the students will naturally learn next based on what is known about them and the learning process involved. Thus this type of philosophy might lead to a survey of the existing literature on second language acquisition in search of the hierarchical steps involved in the language learning process. *The Diagnostic Philosophy* proposes that need is anything that would prove harmful if it was missing. This might lead to an analysis of the important language skills necessary for the survival of the immigrants (e.g. the daily needs of language, types of language).

Richterich (in Jordan, 1997: 22-3) points out that the starting point of any need analysis is to pose some fundamental questions which can help us to see the appropriate type of analysis and the data needed. Further Richterich proposes seven fundamental questions to collect the type of responses needed from the informants: (1) *Why* is the analysis being undertaken? (to determine the type of syllabus and content, materials, teaching/learning, for placement on appropriate course, to inform EAP teachers through articles in journals ...), (2) *Whose* needs are to be analyzed? (the student's, the sponsor's- institution or country, the specialist department ...), (3) *Who* perform the analysis? Who decides what the language needs are? (sponsor, teacher, student, researcher, consultant, ...), (4) *What* is to be analyzed? (target situation, present situation, deficiencies, strategies, means, constraints, necessities, lacks, wants, ...), (5) *How* is the analysis to be conducted? (test, questionnaire, interview, documentation,...), (6) *When* is the analysis undertaken? (before the course/tuition, at the start of the course, during the course, at the end of the course, ...), (7) *Where* is the course to be held (in the target country, in the student's own country, in a third country,...).

5. Needs and Kinds of Needs

The term needs is used to refer to wants, desires, demands, expectations, motivations, lacks, constraints, and requirements (Brindley in Richards, 2002: 54). Needs are often described in terms of a linguistic deficiency, that is, as describing the difference between what a learner can presently do in a language and what she or he should be able to do. Needs are often described in terms of language needs, that is, as the language skills needed to survive in an English-dominant society.

Hutchinson and Waters (1997: 54-7) make a distinction between **target needs** and **learning needs**. The distinction between target needs and learning needs is roughly equivalent to Mackay's distinction (1979: 28) between job needs and academic needs. Target needs refer to what the learner needs to do in the target situation. Target needs can be differentiated into necessities, lacks, and wants. **Necessities** is the type of need determined by the demands of the target situation, that is, what the learner has to know in order to function effectively in target situation. **Lacks** is the gap between the existing proficiency and the target proficiency. **Wants** is the expectation to be successful in the target situation. Astika has a bit different idea about wants. Astika (1999: 36) states that wants refer to what the learner actually wants to learn or what they feel they need. The relation among the three can be **the starting point (lacks) and the destination (necessities), to what destination should be (wants)**. Learning needs deal with what the learner needs to do in order to learn. Job needs are needs where English is required in order to perform a particular practical job (e.g. technician requiring English in order to work on a project in which English is used) and academic needs are needs where English is required for further academic study (e.g. medical students requiring English in order to understand lectures/read medical textbooks in English).

Fortunately, three basic dichotomies exist that can help narrow the choices of what to investigate in a needs analysis (Brown, 1995: 39). The first dichotomy is one that distinguishes between situation needs versus language needs. **Situation needs** are some information that centers on the program's human aspects – the physical, social, and psychological contexts in which learning takes place. Such needs are usually related to any administrative, financial, logistical, manpower, pedagogic, religious, cultural, personal, or other factors that might have impact on the program. **Language needs** are the target linguistic behavior that the learners must ultimately require.

The second dichotomy proposed by Brindley (in Brown, 1995: 40) is one that differentiates between objective needs and subjective needs. **Objective needs** are those needs determined on the basis of clear-cut, observable data gathered about the situation, the learners, the language that students must eventually acquire, their present proficiency and skill levels, and so forth. **Subjective needs** are generally more difficult to determine because they have to do with "wants", "desires", and "expectations".

Another dichotomy is one that deals with linguistic content needs and learning process needs. **Linguistic content needs** tend to favor needs of phonemes, morphemes, grammatical structures, case rules, utterances, functions, notions, discourse markers, and so on. **Learning process needs** lean towards needs specified from a situation needs perspectives (affective domain-as motivation and self-esteem). The difference between learning needs and content needs is roughly equivalent to Widdowson's dichotomy (1981: 2 in Hutchinson, 1994: 16) between the "goal oriented definition of needs" and the "process-oriented definition of needs"; or Brindley duality (1984: 31-2), "language content" and "learning content"; or Nunan's dichotomy (1985) between "content" and "methodology" parameter.

6. Procedures of Gathering Information about Needs

In order we can get the important and relevant information about learners' needs, a variety of procedures can be used. The information gathered is often dependent on the type of procedures selected (Richards, 2002: 59). Further, he states that since any one source of information is likely to be incomplete or partial, a *triangular approach* (i.e. collecting information from two or more sources) is advisable. Similar idea is also presented by Hutchinson and Waters (1994: 59) that in view of the complexity of needs, it is desirable to use more than one of these methods. The choice will obviously depend on the time and resources available.

There are a number of ways in which information about needs can be collected. Hutchinson and Waters (1994: 58) point out that the most frequently used are **questionnaires, interviews, observation, data collection (e.g. gathering texts), informal consultation with sponsors, learners, and others**. Besides, Richards (2002: 60-2) states that procedures of collecting information during a needs analysis can be selected from among **self-ratings, meetings, collecting learner language sample, tasks analysis, and case studies**. Further, Richards gives elaboration of the procedures as the following.

Questionnaire are one of the commonest instruments used. They can also be used to elicit information about many different kinds of issues, such language use, communication difficulties, preferred learning styles, preferred classroom activities, attitudes, and beliefs. Questionnaire can seek information on situations where language is used, self-assessment of current proficiency level, previous experience, views on teaching-learning materials, views on approach, and views on language. Piloting questionnaire is essential to identify ambiguities and other problems before the questionnaire is administered. Self-ratings consist

of scales which students or others use to rate knowledge or abilities. Self-ratings might also be included as a part of questionnaire.

Interviews allow for more in depth exploration of issues than is possible with a questionnaire. An interview may often be useful at preliminary stage of designing questionnaire. A meeting allows a large amount of information to be collected in a fairly short time. For example a meeting of teachers might generate a wide range of ideas.

Observation is another way of assessing the learners' needs. People often do not perform well when they are being observed so this has to be taken into account. In addition, observation is a specialized skill. Knowing how to observe, what to look for, and how to make use of the information obtained, generally requires specialized training.

Collecting data on how well learners perform on different language tasks and documenting the typical problems they have is useful and direct source of information about learners' language needs. Language samples may be collected through the following means; written or oral tasks, simulation or role play, achievement tests, and performance tests.

Task analysis refers to analysis of the kind of tasks the learners will have to carry out in English in a future occupational or educational setting and assessment of the linguistic characteristics demand of the tasks. Once target tasks have been identified their linguistic characteristics are determined as a basis for designing a language course or training materials.

With a case study a single student or selected group of students is followed through a relevant work or educational experience in order to determine the characteristics of that situation. Although it is generally not possible to generalize from a case study, it provides a very rich source of information that may complement information obtained from other sources.

7. The Purpose of Needs Analysis

Determining the purpose of needs analysis is the first step that should be taken into consideration by the course designer. Course designer in carrying out needs analysis at least has two categories of purposes. First, it is related to curriculum development, and second it is connected with language teaching. In language curriculum development, according to Richards (1997: 1-2), needs analysis serves the purposes of:

- (1) providing mechanism for obtaining a wider range of input into the content, design, and implementation of a language program through involving such people as learners, teachers, administrators, and employers in the learning process,
- (2) identifying general or specific language needs that can be addressed in developing goals, objectives, and content for language program,
- (3) providing data that can serve as the basis for reviewing and evaluating an existing program.

In the more recent literature, Richards (2002: 52) states that needs analysis in language teaching may be used for a number of different purposes, for example:

- (1) to find out what language skills a learner needs in order to perform a particular role such as sales manager, tour guide, or university students,
- (2) to help determine if an existing course adequately addresses the needs of potential students,
- (3) to determine which students from a group are most in need of training in particular language skills,
- (4) to identify change of direction that people on a reference group feel is important,
- (5) to identify gap between what students are able to do what they need to be able to do
- (6) to collect information about a particular problem learners are experiencing.

Linse (in Richards, 2002: 53) gives more detailed explanation about the purpose of needs analysis. In the case of ESL program Linse identifies the following purposes for needs analysis:

- (1) to compile demographic profile of all the language and language groups represented by the students,
- (2) to assess their level of language acquisition in their native language and in English,
- (3) to determine their communicative abilities in English,
- (4) to determine their formal knowledge of English,
- (5) to find out how students use language on a daily basis
- (6) to determine what language skills are necessary to enable students to participate in all school community activities in English.
- (7) to find out what prior experiences students have had with formal education,
- (8) to determine the attitudes of the students and their families towards formal schooling and education,
- (9) to find out what preliteracy and literacy skills the students possess
- (10) to ascertain the students' level of cognitive development and acquisition of academic skills in their native language(s),
- (11) to ascertain what cognitive and academic skills students have acquired in English,
- (12) to determine the cultural, political, and personal characteristics of students

8. The Notion of Course Design

Effective language course needs preparation. Preparation usually takes place before the course is conducted. Course Design is an important aspects of this preparation. Course design or pre-course planning is the immediate step to do after the course designer carrying out needs analysis.

Course design consists of the terms "course" and "design". A course is a planned

sequence of learning experiences, occupying several learning sessions and involving some forms of assessment of the learners' work (Rowntree in Bunyi, 1995: 126). Design is the overall plan, picture, framework or structure with which to work in creating the final product (Bunyi, 1999: 127). Further, she defines course design as the planning and writing of a framework to guide the teaching and learning of a unit.

Similar opinion on course design is proposed by Hutchinson and Waters (1997: 65). They state that course design is the process by which the raw data about a learning need is interpreted in order to produce an integrated series of teaching-learning experiences, whose ultimate aim is to lead the learners to a particular state of knowledge. In addition, they point out that course design is a negotiated process and dynamic process. The former refers to a process of negotiation between individuals and society. Society sets the target and the individuals must do their best to get as close to that target as possible. The latter implies that the course design needs to have built-in feedback channels to enable the course to respond to development.

9. Course Design Process

Taba (in Dubin and Olshtain, 1990: 2) states that the course design processes include (1) diagnosis of needs, (2) formulation of objectives, (3) selection of content, (4) organization of content, (5) selection of learning experiences, (7) determination of what to evaluate, and what the means to evaluate.

Bunyi (1995: 128) proposes that there are five major steps in the course design process; (1) situational analysis, (2) objectives formulation, (3) content derivation, (4) selection of appropriate methods and media, (5) determination of evaluation procedures and schedules.

Combining Taba's ideas and Bunyi's opinions, the course design processes com-

prise (1) situational analysis, (2) diagnosis of needs, (3) objectives formulation, (4) selection and organization of content, (5) selection and organization of learning experiences, (6) selection of appropriate methods and media, (7) determination of what to evaluate, what means to evaluate, and schedule.

10. Approach to Course Design

In order to achieve the objectives of the course, it is necessary to adopt the most suitable approach. Hutchinson and Waters (1997: 65-72) point out that there are four approaches in course design; (1) language-centred approach, (2) skills-centred approach, (3) learning-centred approach, and (4) learner-centred approach. Language-centred approach fails to recognize the fact that learners being people, learning is not straightforward, logical process. The skills-centred approach is founded on two fundamental principles, one theoretical, the other pragmatic. The basic theoretical hypothesis is that underlying any language behavior are certain skills and strategies, which the learner uses in order to produce or comprehend discourse. The pragmatic basis for the skills-centred approach derives from a distinction made by Widdowson (1981) between the goal oriented courses and process-oriented courses. This approach approaches the learner as *a user of language* rather than as *a learner of language*.

Learning-centred approach indicates that the concern is maximize learning. Learning, as internal process, is seen as a process in which the learners use what knowledge or skills they have in order to make sense of the flow of new information. The learner-centred approach is based on the principle that learning is totally determined by the learner.

11. Conclusion

To have successful language teaching-learning process, Course Design and Needs Analysis cannot be separated. Needs Analysis can facili-

tate the course designer in planning the language program. After obtaining the data from needs analysis, the course designer can get a lot of answers or information from the learners. The data must be interpreted by the course designer to produce integrated series of teaching-learning experiences. After interpreting the data, by making the use of theoretical and empirical information available, the course designer can produce syllabus, select, adapt or write materials in accordance with syllabus. Finally, in classroom activities the teacher can adopt the suitable approach and techniques, and develop the appropriate procedures of assessment.

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