

Needs Analysis

“Speaking of a need (language or other) is not the same as speaking in general of what is lacking. A need does not exist prior to a project; it is always constructed.”

Porcer (1983:129)

Introduction:

In foreign and second language teaching, and particularly in designing a course in ESP, one goal is to meet the learners’ needs. In order to discover who the learners are, what they already know and what they want from the class; it is important to conduct some type of needs analysis. Just as no medical intervention would be prescribed before a thorough diagnosis of what ails the patient, so no language-teaching program should be designed without thorough needs analysis.

Modern needs analysts owe a considerable debt to the pioneers in this important sub-field of applied linguistics, many of them still active: Jordan, MacKay, Mountford, Strevens, Swales, Trim, VanEck, Van Hest, Oud-de-Glas, Johns, Hutchinson, Waters, Brindley, Hyland, Flowerdew and Dudley Evans.

1/Definition of Needs:

The concepts of ‘Needs’ in today’s English language learning environment, not only refers to the needs of the learner but also takes account the teaching situations, the user-institutions and even the society at large.

Richterich (1972) suggested that there is a solid relationship between a need and a person. It is people who build their images on the basis of data relating to themselves and their environment. Brindley (1984:28) says: “the term needs refer to wants, desires, demands, expectations, lacks, constraints and requirements.” Berwick (1989:52) suggests a basic definition of need: a need is a “gap or measurable discrepancy between a current state of affairs and a desired future state.”

From these definitions, we notice that the term ‘need’ has a direct relationship with the individual himself. It expresses the wants, desires, demands and expectations of the individual in relation with his environment.

2/Classification of Needs:

Needs are described as: “objective and subjective needs” (Brindley, 1989:65), “perceived and felt” (Berwick, 1989:55), “target situation/goal-oriented” (Brindley, 1989:63). In addition, there are “necessities, wants and lacks” (Hutchinson and Waters, 1987:55).

These terms have been introduced to describe the different factors and perspectives which have helped the concept of needs to grow. The objective needs are derived from factual information about the learner and his usage of the language in the real life situation. The learner’s current language proficiency and difficulties are taken into consideration. However, the subjective needs refer to the learner’s wants and expectations. These are taken into consideration along with the language learning styles and strategies. Thus, to be able to follow instructions accurately is an objective/perceived need. To feel confident is a subjective/ felt need. Similarly, product-oriented needs derive from the goal or target situation and process-oriented needs derive from the learning situation.

3/ Types of Needs:

3.1/The Learners’ needs:

The learners’ needs are one of the most essential types of NA process. Richards (2001) stated that the teaching of different types of students must be restricted to their different language needs. He goes further with his view that learners’ needs are specific; they should be identified, and they should determine the content of any course. Richard’s view might be helpful especially in an ESP course because necessarily the broad content of the course would not match the different needs of different types of students.

On the other hand, Bloor (ELT documents, 117) defines the learners’ needs as learner-centered; Bloor clarifies this concept as: “what the learner can do at the commencement of the course, what problems he/ she may have or what skills he may possess that will enable him to learn well in certain directions.”(Bloor ELT documents,117:17). Teachers and planners of an ESP course should get the most benefit from the learners’ needs and interests while designing an ESP course; therefore, analyzing such needs would be useful while designing such courses.

3.2/The Target Needs:

In ESP, the learners' needs might be determined by their target needs. Bloor (ELT documents, 117) defines the target needs as target-centered, which she regards as the learners' future roles and responsibilities in their occupational atmosphere and what language skills or linguistic knowledge the learners need in order to perform their roles sufficiently. Figure one summarizes the two types of needs:

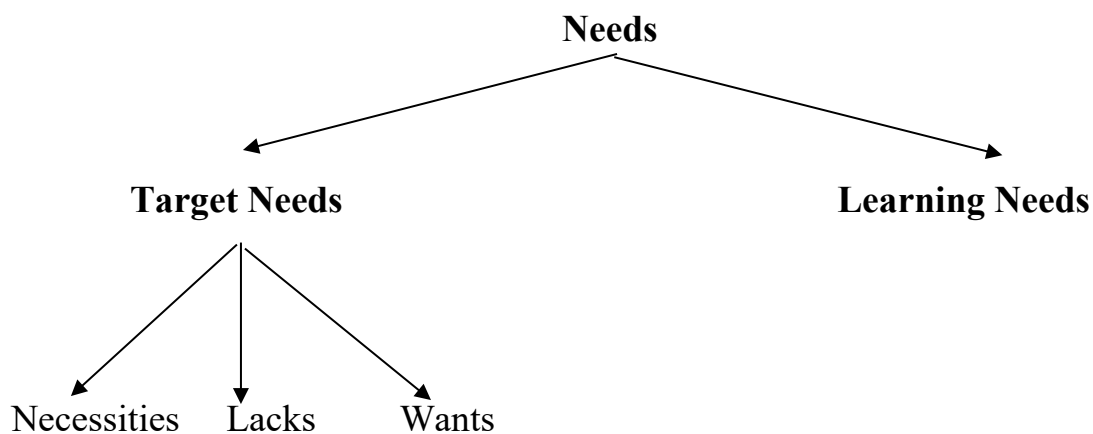


Figure1: Types of needs

-Necessities :

Are the academic or occupational requirements of the target situation, that is, what the learner has to know in order to function effectively in the target situation. Accordingly, needs “are perhaps more appropriately described as objectives” (Robinson, 1991: 7) to be achieved.

-Lacks :

Are what the learners are deficient in, i.e. what they ignore or cannot perform in English. Subsequently, lacks are the gaps between the initial or actual situation of the learners in terms of language proficiency or aptitudes, and the one which is required after the accomplishment of the language training.

-Wants :

Are the learners’ personal expectations and hopes towards acquiring English, i.e. what they would like to gain from the language course.

In order to design the syllabus content, the ESP practitioners have to take into consideration the learners' aims; however, in almost all cases, these contrast with the lacks identified by the teacher or the necessities of the

target situation. This divergence leads West (1993) to add « **constraints** » as fourth type of target needs. “ It involves the nonpedagogic limits that control a course planning process such as the role of the national policy, and financial restrictions, which the analysts need to be aware of once they start the process of NIA”(Benyelles 2001 :31).

4/Needs Analysis:

4.1/ Historical background of Needs Analysis:

Why needs analysis should be conducted can be best answered by simply stating ‘what needs analysis’ is. We have mentioned before that Berwick (1989:52) suggests a basic definition of need: a need is a “gap or measurable discrepancy between a current state of affairs and a desired future state.” Accordingly, the term “analysis of needs” was first used.

Needs analysis procedure in the field of language teaching was first used by Michael West in a survey report published in 1926(White, 1988) .In the following decades, however, little if any attention was given to needs analysis. This can be explained largely by the influence that traditional structural view of the language continued to exert on the field of English Language Teaching (ELT); that resulted in the belief that the goal of second and foreign language learning was the mastery of these structurally related elements of language, i.e. phonological units, grammatical operations and lexical items (Richards and Rodgers,1986).What language learners needed to acquire these structural elements, it was widely believed, was adequate knowledge of the language. The belief that all learners more or less acquired this knowledge in the same way argued against the concept of individual needs.

The term “needs analysis” re-emerged during the 1970s as a result of intensive studies conducted by the Council of Europe team. The team was responsible for developing a new approach towards teaching the major European languages to European adults. Research and studies conducted by the Council of Europe team resulted in the emergence of the communicative approach to language learning which replaced the situational approach dominant in language teaching and learning at that time. The Council of Europe team felt that successful language learning resulted not from mastering linguistic elements, but from determining exactly, what the learner needed to do with the target language.

The subject of NA started to gain prominence in the west during the last two decades of the 20th century, more specifically, with Munby’s (1978) classification of communicative needs. Researchers have realized that it is not practical to attempt to teach the whole of a foreign language, as this will require more time and effort than is practically possible for the majority of learners and teachers alike (Maley, 1983). It has been argued that even native speakers of the language do not use all their information about their first language (L1), and that much of this information is used passively, i.e. at the

recognition level only. Accordingly, focusing on the reasons why learners need to learn the foreign language will better enable language-teaching professionals to cater for their learners' specific needs and save a lot of wasted time and effort. The seminal work of Munby (1978) has led researchers, especially in the field of English for specific purposes, to propose various NA taxonomies, and suggest various ways in which students' needs may be analyzed e.g. Benesch (1996); Ferris (1998); Harowitz (1986); Hutchinson and Waters (1984,1987); Johns (1981); Seedhouse (1995); Tudor (1993) and West (1994).

According to Hutchinson and Waters (1987:53), needs analysis started mainly in the field of ESP. Nevertheless, they argue that as far as needs analysis is concerned, there should not be any difference between ESP and General English (GE). They state that:

It is often argued that the needs of the general English learner, for example the schoolchild, are not specifiable...In fact, this is the weakest of all arguments, because it is always possible to specify needs, even if it is only the need to pass the exam at the end of the school year. There is always an identifiable need of some sort. What distinguishes ES from General English is not the existence of a need as such but rather an awareness of the need.

Similarly, Richards (1990, cited in West, 1994:13) believes that "most of the literature on needs analysis originally came from the realm of TESP but needs analysis procedure have increasingly come to be seen as fundamental to the planning of general language courses". Richards, also, clarifies the concept of needs analysis as "procedures used to collect information about learners' needs are known as need analysis." In more interesting definition of needs analysis, Richards and Platt (1992:242) explain this concept 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."

4.2/Definitions of Needs Analysis:

Brown (1995) identifies the term needs analysis (also called needs assessment) as the activities involved in gathering information that will serve as the basis for developing a curriculum which meet the learning needs of a particular group of students. In language programs, the needs are language related. Once identified, needs can be stated in terms of goals and objectives that, in turn, can serve as the bases for developing tests, materials, teaching activities, and evaluation strategies. The purpose is to fill the "gap" of what a language program "lacks".

Soriano (1995) indicates that needs analysis collects and analyzes data to determine what learners 'want' and 'need' to learn, while an evaluation measures the effectiveness of a program to meet the needs of the learners.

Hutchinson and Waters (1992) define needs analysis on the basis of ‘necessities’ and ‘wants’ in order to classify between what the learners have to know and what the learners feel they need to know. The focus here is on the ‘lacks’ that represent the gap between the required proficiency in the target situation and the existing proficiency of the learners. This definition views language needs as a process of negotiation between the learners and their society.

Wilkin and Altschuld (1995) define needs analysis as a systematic set of procedures undertaken for the purpose of setting priorities and making decisions about programs or organizational improvement and allocation of resources. According to this definition, needs analysis should fill the “gap” of needs between the current state of affairs and the desired state of affairs.

Rationale for NIA in Pedagogy :

Pedagogically, needs are always defined as the learners’ requests in order to communicate efficiently in specific situations. “The idea of analysing the language needs of the learner as a basis for course development has become almost synonymous with ESP”. (McDonough 1984: 29). Hence, ESP has its foundation on the exploration and analysis of learners’ purposes and the set of communicative requirements arising from these purposes. The analysis of the specific needs serves as the introduction to an ESP course design, “...any course should be based on an analysis of learner need” (Hutchinson & Waters 1987: 53), because it determines the reasons and procedures that should be used to achieve satisfactory communicative results. “The rationale for needs analysis is that by identifying elements of students’ target English situations and using them as the basis of EAP/ESP instruction, teachers will be able to provide students with the specific language they need to succeed in their courses and future careers”. (Johns, 1991: 67). In sum, the reasons for performing NIA, according to Long (2005) are to determine the relevance of the material to the learners’ situation, to justify the accountability of the material to all the constituents implicated in the situation, to describe and explain learners’ differences in terms of needs and style and, finally to produce efficient materials that will fulfil learners’ requirements and needs as wholly as possible.

4. 3/ Needs Analysis Taxonomies:

Though needs analysis, as we know it today, has gone through many stages, with the publication of Munby’s Communicative Syllabus Design in 1978, situations and functions were set within the frame of needs analysis. In his book, Munby introduced ‘communication needs processor’ which is the basis of Munby’s approach to needs analysis. Based on Munby’s work, Chambers (1980) introduced the term *Target Situation Analysis*.

Form that time several other terms have also been introduced: *Present Situation Analysis, Pedagogic Needs Analysis, Deficiency Analysis, Strategy Analysis or Learning Needs Analysis, Means Analysis, Register analysis, Discourse analysis, and Genre Analysis.*

- Target situation analysis (TSA) : it identifies the 'necessities', i.e. the demands of the target situation or, in other words, what the learners need to know in order to function effectively in the target situation.

Needs analysis was firmly established in the mid-1970s (West, 1998). In the earlier periods needs analysis was mainly concerned with linguistic and register analysis, and as Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998) suggest, needs were seen as discrete language items of grammar and vocabulary. With the publication of Munby's *Communicative Syllabus Design* (1978) needs analysis moved towards placing the learner's purposes in the central position within the framework of needs analysis.

Consequently, the notion of target needs became paramount and research proved that function and situation were also fundamental. The term *Target Situation Analysis* (TSA) was, in fact, first used by Chambers in his 1980 article in which he tried to clarify the confusion of terminology. For Chambers TSA is "communication in the target situation" (p.29). In his work Munby (1978) introduced *Communicative Needs Processor* (CNP). As Hutchinson and Waters (1987: 54) say:

With the development of the CNP it seemed as if ESP had come of age. The machinery for identifying the needs of any group of learners had been provided: all the course designers had to do was to operate it.

-Present Situation Analysis (PSA):

Present situation analysis may be posited as a complement to target situation analysis (Robinson, 1991; Jordan, 1997). If target situation analysis tries to establish what the learners are expected to be like at the end of the language course, present situation analysis attempts to identify what they are like at the beginning of it. As Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998: 125) state "a PSA estimates strengths and weaknesses in language, skills, learning experiences." If the destination point to which the students need to get is to be established, first the starting point has to be defined, and this is provided by means of PSA.

The term PSA (Present Situation Analysis) was first proposed by Richterich and Chancerel (1980). In this approach the sources of information are the students themselves, the teaching establishment, and the user-institution, e.g. place of work (Jordan, 1997). The PSA can be carried out by means of established placement tests. However, the background information, e.g. years of learning English, level of education, etc. about learners can provide us with enough information about their present abilities which can thus be predicted to some extent. Needs analysis may be seen as a combination of TSA and PSA. As noted, within the realm of ESP, one cannot rely either on TSA or PSA as a reliable indicator of what is needed to enhance learning and reaching the desired goals. Consequently, other approaches to needs analysis have been proposed, such as *Pedagogic Needs Analysis*.

-Pedagogic Needs Analysis:

The term “pedagogic needs analysis” was proposed by West (1998) as an umbrella term to describe the following three elements of needs analysis. He states the fact that shortcomings of target needs analysis should be compensated for by collecting data about the learner and the learning environment. The term ‘pedagogic needs analysis’ covers *deficiency analysis, strategy analysis or learning needs analysis, and means analysis.*

-Deficiency Analysis: it is the gap between what the learners know at present and what they are required to know or do at the end of the program. Other aspects of deficiency analysis investigate whether students are required to do something in the target language that they cannot do in their native language.

What Hutchinson and Waters (1987) define as *lacks* can be matched with deficiency analysis. Also, according to Allwright (1982, quoted in West, 1994), the approaches to needs analysis that have been developed to consider learners’ present needs or wants may be called analysis of learners’

deficiencies or lacks. From what has already been said, it is obvious that deficiency analysis is the route to cover from point A (present situation) to point B (target situation), always keeping the learning needs in mind. Therefore, deficiency analysis can form the basis of the language syllabus (Jordan, 1997) because it should provide data about both the gap between present and target extralinguistic knowledge, mastery of general English, language skills, and learning strategies.

- Strategy analysis or Learning Needs Analysis: it mainly identifies the learners’ preferred learning styles.

Obviously the focus here is on methodology, but there are other related areas such as: reading in and out of class, grouping size, doing homework, learning habits, correction preferences, etc.

As it is apparent from the name, this type of needs analysis has to do with the strategies that learners employ in order to learn another language. This tries to establish how the learners wish to learn rather than what they need to learn (West, 1998). All the above-mentioned approaches to needs analysis, TSA, PSA, and to some extent deficiency analysis, have not been concerned with the learners’ views of learning. Allwright who was a pioneer in the field of *strategy analysis* (West, 1994) started from the students’ perceptions of their needs in their own terms (Jordan, 1997). It is Allwright who makes a distinction between *needs* (the skills which a student sees as being relevant to himself or herself), *wants* (those needs on which students put a high priority in the available, limited time), and *lacks* (the difference between the student’s present competence and the desired competence). His ideas were adopted later by Hutchinson and Waters (1987), who advocate a learning-centered approach in which learners’ learning needs play a vital role. If the analyst, by means of target situation analysis, tries to find

out what learners do with language (Hutchinson and Waters, 1987) learning needs analysis will tell us "what the learner needs to do in order to learn" (*ibid*: 54). Obviously, they advocate a process-oriented approach, not a product- or goal-oriented one. For them ESP is not "a product but an approach to language teaching which is directed by specific and apparent reasons for learning" (Hutchinson and Waters, 1987: 16). What learners should be taught are skills that enable them to reach the target, the process of learning and motivation should be considered as well as the fact that different learners learn in different ways (Dudley-Evans and St. John, 1998).

- Means analysis: it is mainly concerned with the logistics, practicalities, and constraints of needs-based language courses. West (1994) points out that some analysts believe that instead of focusing on constraints, it might be better if course designers think about how to implement plans in the local situation.

Means analysis tries to investigate those considerations that Munby excludes (West, 1998), that is, matters of logistics and pedagogy that led to debate about practicalities and constraints in implementing needs-based language courses (West, 1994). Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998: 125) suggest that means analysis provides us "information about the environment in which the course will be run" and thus attempts to adapt to ESP course to the cultural environment in which it will be run.

One of the main issues means analysis is concerned with is an "acknowledgement that what works well in one situation may not work in another" (Dudley-Evans and St. John, 1998: 124), and that, as noted above, ESP syllabi should be sensitive to the particular cultural environment in which the course will be imposed. Or as Jordan (1997) says it should provide us with a tool for designing an environmentally sensitive course.

4.4/Steps in a Need Analysis:

Schutz and Derwing (1981:35) advocated using eight steps in a Need Analysis, "which could seem to constitute an absolute minimum for any needs assessment effort worthy of the name"; Jordan (1997: 23) argued for ten steps, while Graves (2000:100) listed seven steps. As it is illustrated in table1:

Schutz&Derwing (1981:35)	Jordan (1997:23)	Graves (2000:100)	Stages (steps combined)
1. Define the purpose	1. Delimit the purpose of analysis	1. Decide what information to gather and why	A. get ready to do NA 1. Define the purpose of NA
2. Delimit the target population	2. Delimit student population	2. Decide the best way to gather it: when, how and from whom	2. Delimit the student 3. Decide upon approach(es) and syllabus(es)
3. Delimit the	3. Decide upon approach	3. Gather the information	4. Recognize constraints

Parameters of investigation		4. Interpret the information	5. Select data collection procedures
4. Select the information gathering instrument	4. Acknowledge constraints/ limitations		
5. Collect the data	5. Select methods of collecting data.	5. Act on the information	6. collect data
6. Analyze the results	6. Collect data	6. Evaluate the effect and effectiveness of the action	7. Analyze data
7. Interpret the result	7. Analyze and interpret results		8. Interpret result
8. Critique the project	8. Determine objectives	7. Decide on further or new information to gather.	C. Use the NA results
	9. Implement decisions (i.e. decide upon syllabus, content Materials, methods)		9. Determine objectives
	10. Evaluate procedures and results		10. evaluate and report on the NA project

Table 1: Steps in the NA process

4.5/ Implementing NA in language teaching:

As the research to date holds, the learners and teachers may have different needs. Robinson (1991) believes that needs analysts should be cautious in collecting information from various sources due to the multiplicity and diversity of the views on prerequisites for an ESP course.

Hutchinson and Waters (1987) hold that the relationship between necessities, as perceived by an ESP teacher and what the learners want or feel, can be at extreme poles. However, they suggest that learners' perceived wants and wishes should be considered carefully, and due to objective and subjective reality of needs, each learning situation should be considered uniquely and systematically.

The research to date emphasizes the significance of a needs analysis for devising a course, writing textbooks or course books, and the kind of teaching and learning that takes place (Robinson, 1991; Jordan, 1997). Yet it is recommended that a needs analysis should be carried out continuously because "as students become more involved with the course, their attitudes and approach may change" (Robinson, 1991: 15).

A needs analysis answers the questions who, what, when, and where but not how, that is, the target audience (who needs to be trained), the task or content (what needs to be taught) and the context or training environment (where and when the training needs to be conducted) (Clark, 1998).

Referring to growing demands for accountability and relevancy in public life, Long (2005) cites four reasons for performing needs analyses: First, to determine the relevance of the material to the learners' situations; second, to justify the material in terms of relevance for all parties concerned (teacher, learner, administration, parents); third, to account for differences in learner needs and styles; fourth, to create a syllabus which will meet the needs of the learners as fully as possible within the context of the situation. Accordingly, every language course should be viewed as a course for specific purposes which just varies in the precision with which learner needs can be specified.

4.6/ Pedagogical implications:

Implementing an academic needs analysis has a significant role in the identification and examination of needs for any educational institution. An ongoing needs analysis should be a prerequisite for any program / course design in order to achieve effective instructional outcomes. Besides this, it can help educators and administrators to gain awareness of the 'context variable' (Chuadron, 1990), and program designers to provide appropriate instructional input to foster effective learning.

Concerning the fact that academic needs of administrators, educators and students change through time, the requirement of an ongoing needs assessment for any educational institution becomes crucial in order to promote effective teaching and learning.

Needs Analysis is a useful tool to investigate learners' wants and wishes to learn a foreign language. However, it is not an easy task to perceive a need analysis unless all the parties included in the process of teaching and learning a foreign language is included.