

A PROPOSAL ON NEEDS ANALYSIS – VOICES FROM ESP CORNER

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Abstract

Nowadays, English is often a decisive factor in employment opportunities with higher earnings and in organizations aiming at higher productivity. Proficiency in English therefore, is needed for employees to advance in both local and international companies and to improve their technical knowledge and skills. English language aptitude works as one of the important determining factors to get a job, to earn higher salary, and get other advantages in employment market. To that extent, Professional English or commonly known as English for Specific Purposes (ESP) has been considered the most important linguistic capital in today's world where sound skills in English work as a vehicle to sound opportunities and economic benefits in career track over the world. This study examines key literature regarding needs analysis in the field of teaching and learning ESP, based on which relevant research approach is proposed with the hope of promoting ESP proficiency in the new context.

Key words: *needs analysis; ESP; ESP proficiency*

1. Introduction

In today's era of information boom and global integration, the English ability is among the prerequisites for each citizen to go ahead, catch up, integrate and touch on the height of the world knowledge. Together with the development and integration of our country, having basic English level as well as mastering and effectively using English of their course is very essential. It is vital to change delivery methods towards positive and active way to promote students in remembering difficult specialized terms. This is a challenge for ESP teachers, requiring further adjustment and enhancement of applying flexible measures to improve the efficiency (Schellekens, 2001). Moreover, it is believed that successfully applying these methods will better serve the society demand of highly-trained labors with English competency in specialized fields that can act independently and confidently in an international integration environment. Thus, the growing demand for English as a medium of communication and the introduction of governmental mass educational programs in which English was the first or even the only language contributed to the rapid expansion in ESP programs. The communicative trend in teaching and learning English has resulted in different reasons for acquiring this language proficiency and ESP was created with all these in view (Masoupanah & Tahririan, 2013).

2. Literature Review

Recent literature has suggested that the relationship between globalization and the English language implicates employability in the job market (Chowdhury & Roshid, 2013). Although the effects are uneven in different occupational groups and in different countries, such relationship is growing in significance to policy makers. It was found that in various ways one's English language skills influence prospects of employment, especially in contributing to the possibility of "secure" and "better" jobs. The implications may inform educational policy planners, teacher educators, employers and career advisers to optimize English language learning programs that support increased employability through English.

a. Definition of Needs and Needs Analysis

Because ESP courses are based on needs analysis (NA), the learning objectives are more obvious than would be in the case of general ESL courses and it can be assumed that students will be more highly motivated in learning about topics and texts which are related to their study or work areas. It is difficult to find a consensus over the definition of NA among ESP researchers. This can be explained by the seemingly problematic combination of two essentially subjective terms: "needs" and "analysis". While Hutchinson and Waters (1987) define needs as necessities, wants and lacks, Brindley (1989) describe it as "the gap between what the learners' actual needs are and what should be taught to them." Therefore, it can be said that needs are what learners will be required to do with a foreign language in a target situation, and how learners might best master the target language during the period of training (West, 1994). Analysis is essentially seen as the exploration process of communicative tasks, that is, what the learners need to do with the target language (Altman, 1980).

Nowadays, the tasks of NA are much more complex: it aims at collecting information about the learners and at defining the target situation and environment of studying ESP. According to Duddley-Evans and St. John (2009), there are eight components in today's concept of NA which have been grouped into five broad areas including: (i) Target situation analysis and objective needs analysis; (ii) Linguistic analysis, discourse analysis, genre analysis, i.e. knowledge of how language and skills are use in the target situations; (iii) Subjective NA, i.e. learners 'wants, means, subjective needs-factors that affect the way they learn; (iv) Present situation analysis for the purpose of identifying learners' current skills and language use and (v) Means analysis.

Definition of needs vary depending on the purpose of analysis but all take the learner as a focus of analysis. Lawson (1979) defines "need" as "something that is recognized but it is not in any sense "discovered", and its "existence" de-rives from whatever criteria are thought to be relevant in making the diagnoses" (p.37). This implies that in order to recognize "needs" one would have to carry out some kind of assessment or evaluation of the existing situation and the diagnosis of assessment results would reveal some deficiency. Widdowson (1981) differentiates "goal-oriented" definition from "process-oriented" definition of needs. The former refers to what the learner needs to do with the language once he or she has learned it, while the latter refers to what the learner needs to do to actually acquire the language (p.2). This definition points to the importance of recognizing the present condition of the learner as far as language learning is concerned, and the target situation where the learner will be required to use the language.

Hutchinson and Waters (1987) make a distinction between "target needs" and "learning needs". The target need refers to what the learner needs to do in the target situation and the learning need refers to what the learner needs to do in order to learn (p.54). They further subcategorize target need into (1) necessities - what the learner has to know in order to function effectively in the target situation, (2) lacks - the discrepancy between necessity and what the learner already knows, (3) wants - what the learner actually wants to learn or what they feel they need.

Berwick (1989), borrowing some insights from the field of adult education, defines "need" as "the gap between what is and what should be" (p.65). The "what is" could be equated to the current state of learner's knowledge and skills and the "what should be" could be interpreted as the target situation requirements. Robinson (1991) notes that the needs that are established for a particular group of students... will be influenced by the ideological preconceptions of the analyst. A different group of analysts working with the same group of students but with different views on teaching and learning would be highly likely to produce a different set of needs (p.7). Types of needs are differentiated with reference to the purpose of learning the language, individual differences or the social roles of language in a wider context.

b. The role of Needs Analysis in ESP

NA is considered as a basic principal of ESP (Robinson, 1991) and most of the information on NA initially came from ESP. Scholars have been debating on the focus of NA. While Hutchinson and Waters (1987) consider learning needs as what the learner needs to do in order to learn, Benesch (2001) perceives that needs are associated strictly with target situation demands. It is clear thus that NA can help learners adapt to the new learning system when their teachers recognize their needs of the learning process (Carlin, 2005; Chamot, 2007). One obvious advantage of NA is that, by identifying them learners in general, NA will identify the weaknesses and strengths of the skills that they may use in potential business or academic contexts.

NA can be a vital asset for teachers of English for specific purposes (ESP) to identify their learners' key requirements or needs and determine the areas in which they are lacking skills. In addition, the results of the NA help ESP teachers to identify the students' prospective professional needs, the students' needs in terms of language skills and the students' deficiencies in the area of language skills. Only after analyzing the students' needs and determining the objectives of the language course, we can select a material that meets the needs of the students. Needs analysis, thus, can be seen as the foundation on which we can develop curriculum content, teaching materials and methods that can lead to increasing the learners' motivation and success.

Riddell (1991) points to the crucial role that NA plays in syllabus and course design because "...through it the course designer becomes equipped to match up the content of the program with the requirements of the student". Bowers (1980) notes the importance of needs as a guide in syllabus development, materials and examination. According to Jordan (1997), NA should be the starting point for devising syllabus, course materials and classroom activities. In the work by Shutz and Derwing (1981), NA is considered as the first step that any course planner should take. The importance of needs is also recognized in the learner-centered language teaching. In this system, the learner and the teacher need to continuously share information as to what the learner wants or needs to study during the course.

NA should be carried out throughout the course in order to adjust the learning objectives as the need arises. In other words, feedback from the learner can be used as bases for modifying learning objectives (Savage & Storer, 1992). Questionnaires and interviews are two commonly used instruments for needs analysis. A flexible combination of questionnaire and interview techniques helps to find out what the students need during the program, what aspects of the program that need improvements and views on how well the program prepares the students to enter business or employment in general.

c. Different Approaches to Needs Analysis

Target Language Approach (TSA):

Target Situation Analysis (TSA): NA 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). his overall model clearly establishes the place of needs analysis as central to ESP, indeed the necessary starting point in materials or course design (West, 1998).

The aim of TSA model is to find as thoroughly as possible the linguistic form a prospective ESP learner is likely to use in various situations in his target working environment (Munby, 1978). The outcome of the processing data is what the learner needs to know in order to function effectively in the target situation. Most subsequent target NA research was based on Munby's model for the reason that it offers comprehensive data banks and target performance (Robinson, 1991). Many researchers in the field of target situation NA followed Munby's TSA. Hutchinson and Waters (1987) provide a comprehensive target situation analysis framework, which consists of a list of questions the analyst should find answers to. Accordingly, the analysis of target situation needs is "in essence a matter of asking questions about the target situation and the attitudes towards that situation of various participants in the learning process".

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) 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 was first proposed in 1980 according to which the sources of information include the students themselves, the teaching establishment, and the workplace (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.

Pedagogic Needs Analysis

The term "pedagogic needs analysis" was proposed by West (1998) as an umbrella term to describe the following three elements of NA. He states the fact that shortcomings of target NA 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

What Hutchinson and Waters (1987) define as lacks can be matched with deficiency analysis. Also, according to 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 a present situation to a target situation, always keeping the learning needs in mind. Therefore, deficiency analysis can form the basis of the language syllabus (Richards, 2007) because it should provide data about both the gap between present and target extralinguistic knowledge, mastery of general English, language skills, and learning strategies.

3. Brief description of the ESP students in this proposal

12 staff members (1 Head, 1 vice Head, 10 subordinates in Division of Export-Import management) of Quang Ninh department of Industry and Commerce (QNDIC) are going to work on a joint project with Japanese counterparts. Actually, this 10-week course is specially ordered by the Management Board of QNDIC so as to provide their most potential employees with essential preparation. Most of the joint work will be conducted in English through e-mails, GoogleDocs, live conferencing videos and periodical meetings (every 3 weeks during the total estimated 5-month period of the project). The average proficiency level of these students is pre-intermediate (380-450 TOEIC), but most of them rarely speak English in their daily work and 10 out of 12 have never made any presentation in English (except the Head and Vice Head). All of them use e-mails and GoogleDocs every day, 70 percent of which are in English and with foreign partners. They expect to obtain presentation and communication skill (especially speaking) at the end of the course so that they can conduct the project efficiently with Japanese partners.

4. Samples of instrument for data collection

The designed questionnaire aims at gathering information about and from ESP learners over the following areas: (i) the present and future domains of language use and thus reasons for studying English; (ii) The learners' attitude towards the role of English at the workplace; (iii) Learning preferences in terms of language skills; (iv) The importance of particular language skills; (v) Preferred learning styles and strategies and (vi) Preference for teaching activities.

Question 1: Why do you take this ESP course? (Tick any relevant options)

- for higher education and training
- for work (compulsory)
- for promotion and status
- for self-improvement and interest
- for a combination of aforementioned

Question 2: Which skill(s) do you want to emphasize more in this ESP course? (Tick under the relevant column equal to point 1 to point 5: 1- least important; 5 – most important)

Skill	1	2	3	4	5
Reading					
Writing					
Listening					
Speaking					
Grammar					
Vocabulary					
Technology					

Question 3: How much time on average can you spend on ESP (beside class hour)?

- 5-7 hours/week
- 3-5 hours/week
- 1-2 hours/week
- None

Question 4: How often do you use English both in professional and life cases? (Tick under the relevant column)

Degree of usage	Medium				Channel			Context	
	Spea	Wri	Rea	Presentation	Telephone	Face-to-face	Texting	Home country	Abroad
Never									
Seldom									
Often									
Usually									

Question 5: Do you think English proficiency can have?

- a good effect on your professional performance and institution's efficiency
- a bad effect on your professional performance and institution's efficiency
- no effect at all on your professional performance and institution's efficiency

Question 6: Do you think the knowledge of subject matter and socio-culture has impact on English learning? (Tick under the relevant column)

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Knowledge of the field					
Socio-culture knowledge					

Question 7: Write short & concise answers for the following questions

- (i) How long have you learnt English? _____ (months/years).
- (ii) What is your current English level? e.g. B1/450 TOEIC/4.5 IELTS _____
- (iii) Among 6 language aspects listed in question 2, which are you most confident of/best at and which are you least confident of/worst at? _____
- (iv) What type of tasks & strategies do you find most appealing and effective to learn English?
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- (v) What teaching methodology are you used to in learning English?
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5. Rationale of the chosen approach for this study

The role of English in commerce and technology has been widely recognized and English courses which cater for this need have been and will continue to play a significant role in the development of commerce and technology. Unlike English courses for general purposes, ESP is different in the way the course is designed. The teaching of ESP is, in many ways similar to the teaching of English in general although there are features that are typical in different specialized subjects and that ESP should be recognized as an approach based on the learner's needs in their respective specialized subjects. Moreover, ESP teaching should be based on the principles of effective learning and teaching language for general purposes. While in the past, the teaching of ESP was primarily concerned with the linguistic aspects of the language it now has shifted towards developing communication skills and learning is very much directed by specific learner's needs for mastering the language (Hutchinson & Water's, 1998). Crocker (1981) also recognizes that ESP courses are similar to language instruction in general which puts more emphasis on language use. The obvious difference is in the focus of interest. While English for general purposes emphasizes language proficiency, ESP courses emphasize "something outside of the language through the medium of language" (p.8). This statement views language mastery as a necessary prerequisite skill that learners must have in order to function well in their future workplace. Unlike English courses in general, an ESP course is a means not an end in itself. ESP accordingly should be taken as an instructional activity which has its own emphases and range of activities. Swale (1980) proposes that to minimize the constraints, collaborative efforts should be made between ESP teachers, subject teachers and administrators to make necessary modifications towards the desired goals. In this respect, Swales also points out to the need for including the learners' factors especially those related to their study habits and learning strategies. For the aforementioned arguments, in this study, needs analysis is a combination of TSA and PSA. As noted, within the realm of ESP, EFL teachers should not lean merely either on TSA or PSA as a reliable indicator of what is needed to enhance learning and reaching the desired goals. Nowadays, all the works done in ESP have sought to promote the communicative nature of language teaching as EFL teachers have been increasingly concerned with the needs of their ESP students.

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