

Roles of Need Analysis in English for Specific Purposes (ESP)

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Abstract

This academic article discusses the role of Needs Analysis or NA in English for Specific Purposes or ESP. NA is the process used to assess learners' specific needs in order to achieve the teaching objectives. Nowadays, it is used to analyze the learners' needs of studying English for Specific Purposes, and ESP is a method of language teaching on which the language contents and instructional approaches are based on the learners' specific reasons for learning a language. In this article, different approaches of need analysis and its importance are discussed. ESP is also explained. Moreover, the examples with case studies of using an NA method to design the ESP courses are also presented.

Keywords: Needs Analysis, English for Specific Purposes

Need Analysis or NA

Need Analysis or NA appeared first in Munby's book "Communicative Syllabus Design" which was first published in 1978. In this book, the term NA was first mentioned as a procedure for language planning course or course design (Phan, 2005: 11). It is a technique and a process used for collecting data that are essential in syllabus and course design (Nunan, 1988: 3). It is the process of determining the needs for which a learner or a group of learners acquires a language and arranges the needs according to priorities (Richards, Platt and Plat, 1992: 242-243). The following framework is proposed by Hutchinson and Waters (1987) for analysis of learners' need:

1. Why are the learners taking the course?
 - compulsory or optional
 - apparent need or not
 - Are status, money, promoting involved?
 - What do learners think they will achieve?
 - What is their attitude towards the ESP course?

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2. How do the learners learn?

- What is their learning background?
- What is their concept of teaching and learning?
- What methodology will appeal to them?
- What sort of techniques bore/alienate them?

3. What sources are available?

- number and professional competence of teachers
- attitude of teachers to ESP
- teachers' knowledge of and attitude to subject content
- materials
- aids
- opportunities for out-of-class activities

4. Who are the learners?

- age/sex/nationality
- What do they know already about English?
- What subject knowledge do they have?
- What are their interests?
- What teaching styles are they used to?
- What is their attitude to English or to the cultures of the English speaking world?

The current concept of need analysis proposed by Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998: 125) includes the following points:

1. Environmental situation-information about the situation in which the course will be run (means analysis);

2. Personal information about learners- factors which may affect the way they learn (wants, means, subject needs);

3. Language information about learners- what their current skills and language use are (present situation analysis);

4. Learners' lack (the gap between the present situation and professional information about learners);

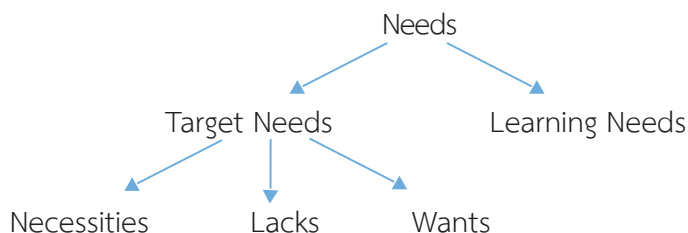
5. Learners' needs from course- what is wanted from the course (short-term needs);

6. Learners' learning needs- effective ways of learning the skills and language determined by lacks;

7. Professional information about learners- the tasks and activities English learners are/will be using English for (target situation analysis and objective needs); and

8. How to communicate in the target situation- knowledge of how language and skills are used in the target situation (register analysis, discourse analysis, genre analysis).

The following diagram proposed by Kandil (2002: 6) presents two main types of needs:



English for Specific Purposes or ESP

ESP stands for English for Specific Purposes. It is an approach to language teaching in which all decisions as to content and methods are based on learners' reason for learning (Hutchinson and Waters, 1987).

Robinson (1991: 3) divides the manner of English for Specific Purposes into four ways:

1. English for Specific Purposes focuses on learning of the students.
2. The course for English for Specific Purposes must be appropriate for the time.
3. Curriculum for English for Specific Purposes for a particular course must be based on the learners' needs and goal.
4. Most students learning English for Specific Purposes are the adult.

According to Stern (1992), there are four types of ESP teaching objectives: proficiency, knowledge, affective and transfer. Moreover, proficiency objectives refer to the master of the four language skills: reading, writing, listening and speaking. Knowledge objectives include the acquisition of linguistic and cultural information. Affective objectives are about the development of positive feeling toward the subject of study. And transfer objectives concern the ability to generalize from what has been learned in one situation or another. Strevens (1988: 39) says, the "ESP is particular case of general category of special-purpose language training. The same principles apply no matter which language is being learnt and taught". Duddley-Evans and St. John (1998) give a similar definition of ESP and both authors cooperated to offer absolute and variable characteristics of ESP. Most researchers seem to agree on two characteristics: a) ESP is based on a particular context; and b) ESP is based on the learners' specific needs.

Importance of NA to ESP Course Design

An analysis of learners' needs is a crucial step of the ESP course covering instructional materials and activities. Nowadays, the tasks of needs analysis is 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 (1998), ESP courses are based on needs analysis, 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. Hutchinson & Waters (1987) state that if we know why learners need English, the content of the language can be adjusted accordingly, and the teaching process will focus on these needs. NA enables the teachers to gather information about their learners' wants, lacks, and needs to be able to prepare for the ESP syllabus (Kandil, 2002: 1).

Needs analysis collection methods depend entirely on the learners. They are submitted to questionnaires, interviews, discussions, assessments and observation. The main data collection methods for needs analysis are questionnaires, discussions, interviews, observations, assessment (Dudley-Evans & Jo St John, 1998:132). It is noted that questionnaires are assumed to be the least consuming ways of data collection. According to Jianjing (2007: 6), the use of questionnaires is described as "one of the most common research methods" since it enables the researchers to "produce a large amount of information about many different issues such as communication difficulties, preferred learning styles, preferred classroom activities, attitudes and beliefs".

Examples of Using an NA Approach to Design the ESP Courses

Here are some of the research relevant to Needs Analysis used for designing the ESP courses:

Case study 1: Nuemaihom (2015) conducted the research entitled "An Analysis of English Needs of Tourism Personnel at Khao Kradong Volcano Forest Park in Buriram Province". The purpose of this mixed qualitative and quantitative research was to analyze the English needs of tourism personnel at Khao Kradong Volcano Forest Park. The population comprised the personnel of Khao Kradong Volcano Forest Park, local vendors and foreign tourists. The samples consisted of 13 personnel, 22 local vendors and 6 foreign tourists visiting the park. They were selected from the population by using a purposive sampling method. The research instruments were composed of a questionnaire and a focus group discussion. The statistics i.e. frequency, percentage, mean and standard deviation were utilized to analyze the descriptive data while the qualitative data were analyzed through content analysis. The findings revealed that the samples needed to improve speaking and listening skills the most while reading and writing and grammar were least needed. Regarding the English course, most of them needed to study the English topics relating to their careers such as Greetings and Welcoming, Thanking and Saying Goodbye, and Introducing Khao Kradong Volcano Forest Park, etc. For English learning innovation, two kinds of English innovations i.e. booklet and CD were most needed by the samples.

Case study 2: Nuemaihom (2514) did the research on “A Study and Development of Innovation on Tourism English Communication for Tourism Personnel at Phnom Rung Sanctuary in Chaloeprakhiat District, Buriram Province”. The objectives of this research were 1) to analyze the need for ESP of the local vendors at Phnom Rung Sanctuary, 2) to design the ESP course and innovation for them, and 3) to investigate their satisfaction with the designed ESP course and innovation. The study subjects consisted of 40 local vendors and 10 foreign tourists. They were selected by using a purposive sampling method. Moreover, 15 Thai participants were purposively selected from the Thai subjects for a focus group discussion. Four research instruments were employed: 1) two sets of questionnaires, one for 40 Thai subjects, and the other for 10 foreign subjects, 2) focus group discussion form, 3) ESP course and innovation, and 4) satisfaction questionnaire. The statistics of frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation were used. The research findings revealed that the samples needed to develop listening and speaking skills much more than reading and writing skills. They needed to study the specific terms and conversations relevant to their jobs. Two appropriate innovations, i.e., booklet and audio CD were needed by the samples. The ESP course designed for local vendors consisted of 21 topics. These topics were as follows: 1) Greetings and Welcoming, 2) Thanking and Saying Goodbye, 3) Polite Refusal 4) Introducing Products, 5) Looking around, 6) Asking for Customers’ Needs, 7) Asking for Product and Price, 8) Telling Price and Exchange Rate, 9) Encouraging Customers, 10) Telling Shape, Color and Size of Products, 11) Telling Materials and Manufacturers, 12) Telling How to Use Products, 13) Price Negotiation, 14) Introducing Tourist Attractions, 15) Asking for and Offering Help, 16) Asking and Telling Time, 17) Asking and Giving Directions, 18) Ordering Food and Beverage, 19) Ordering Dessert and Fruit, 20) Giving Information about Food, and 21) Introducing and Recommending Food.

Case study 3: Nuemaihom (2014) carried out the research entitled “A Study and Development of Innovation on Tourism English Communication for Young Tour Guides at Prasat Muang Tam in Prakhonchai District, Buriram Province”. The objectives of this research were 1) to study state of problems and needs of English for young tour guides at Prasat Muang Tam, 2) to develop innovation on tourism English communication for young tour guides and 3) to investigate their satisfaction with the innovation. The population comprised 17 grade 4 and 34 grade 5 students at Wat Ban Muang Tam School in Prakhonchai District, Buriram Province. The samples were composed of 20 students, five of whom were from grade 4 and 15 of whom were from grade 5. The samples selection was based on their interest and being young tour guides of the Thai language, so a purposive sampling method was utilized. The research instruments consisted of focus group discussion, pre-test and post-test, innovation of tourism English communication, innovation assessment form and satisfaction form. The statistics employed to analyze the quantitative data were percentage, mean, standard deviation and Effectiveness Index (E.I.)

whereas the qualitative data were analyzed through content analysis. The research results revealed that:

1. They most needed to practice 16 English topics. These were 1) Greetings and Welcoming, 2) Introducing Oneself, 3) Brief History of Prasat Muang Tam, 4) Baray or Muang Tam Reservoir, 5) Pediment, 6) Boundary Walls and Doorways, 7) Lintel, 8) Stone Inscriptions, 9) Lotus with 8 Petals, 10) Ponds, 11) Gallery and Arched Doorways, 12) Banalai or Library, 13) Group of 5 Towers, 14) Lotus Bud of the Towers, 15) Giving Directions, and 16) Thanking and Saying Goodbye

2. The post-test scores of their English capability were significantly higher than the pre-test scores at the statistical level of 0.05. This accorded with the hypothesis set.

3. The innovation evaluation made by the experts was overall found at the highest level (4.81). Taking each aspect into consideration, all aspects were also found at the highest level. Moreover, the booklet design and contents were ranked first (4.83) and was followed by English CD (4.71).

Conclusion

In conclusion, Needs Analysis or NA is the process of considering learners' needs of a language learning. It is an approach for gathering data relevant to course and syllabus design. NA is the technique of analyzing the specific needs of a particular group. This analysis serves to prelude to an ESP course design because it determines the "what" and "how" of an ESP course (Jiajing, 2007: 2). Hutchinson and Waters (1987: 18-19) state that in the past, the teaching of ESP was primary concerned with the linguistic aspects of the language. Now, it has shifted towards developing communication skills and learning is very much directed by specific learners' needs for mastering the language. Thus, NA plays an important role in designing the ESP course, and it is the foundation on which teachers can develop syllabus, curriculum contents, teaching materials, activities and instructional methods for increasing learners' success of English learning.

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