

A Study of Students and Professors' Needs in a PhD program of Applied Linguistics

*Orrathip Geerativudhipong, Watcharaporn Rattanajaru, Treesirin Chaloemkiti,
Niramon Rattanasongkhroh & Usama Sangserm*

Mahidol University

Abstract

This study aims to investigate the needs of students and professors towards the doctor of Philosophy program in applied linguistics. The participants of this study were 8 university students who are the current students in the PhD program of Applied Linguistics at a government university and 6 professors whose expertise are in the fields of Applied Linguistics, English language teaching, technology-based language teaching, and innovative education. The research tool was a set of open-ended questions relating to the teaching and learning of the PhD program in Applied Linguistics for the focus group interview. Data were analyzed by means of content analysis. The result revealed that students were satisfied with the program. They expect to be the qualified PhD students and be a good scholar and independent researcher who distribute and apply the knowledge to be beneficial for mankind in their work fields after graduation relating to the philosophy of program, faculty, and university. Moreover, students gave some suggestions for the program which benefits for whom are in charge of the program to develop the program responded to students' needs and wants.

Keywords

needs analysis, PhD program, Applied Linguistics, investigation

Introduction

Education is a tool in developing learners to be the qualitative persons and bring about to the quality society. Since we are in the globalized world where the technology plays the major role and the competition is increasing. The need of education has therefore gained importance nowadays.

The unwanted quality in society reflects the inappropriate educational management. However, the happened failure may not always be caused from the inappropriate educational management. It may be caused from the unknown needs of educational management in achieving the goals. It thus bring to the unsuitable use of methods, approaches, and resources which restrain to reach the needed goals.

To respond to the internationalization in higher education, the doctor of Philosophy program in applied linguistics pursue the achievement of professional development goals and the accomplishment of competences in the working field that improves the quality of the program. The most important step of the program development in education is to carry out the study of comprehensive needs analysis (Erdoğan & Güler, 2017) in order to make the development of the doctor of Philosophy program in applied linguistics, to reach the goals, to increase productivity and to effectively deliver a qualitative program. The needs analysis is therefore a prerequisite method for sustainability of the program development. Information obtained from the needs analysis yields the reasonable and believable of the program development without bias and error, and also save for the time and resources (Sarnrattana, 2012).

This study therefore aims to investigate the needs of students and professors towards the doctor of Philosophy program in applied linguistics with its different dimensions and holistic reality since the continuous study of needs analysis is needed to maintain the effectiveness of the program.

Research Objective

To investigate the needs of students and professors towards the doctor of Philosophy program in applied linguistics

Literature Review

Needs analysis is considered as the preliminary stage in any design of courses, syllabuses, materials and other educational activities (Richterich & Chancerel, 1987; Jordan, 1997). It helps educators and practitioners to clarify and shape the course development that bases the content of courses on the true needs, wants and interests of the learners (Lepetit & Cichocki, 2002; Erdoğan & Güler, 2017).

Needs analysis has been defined by a number of scholars. Some of them are mentioned as the follows.

Kaufman and English (1979) defined that need is a gap between the learners' current outcomes and the learners' desired outcomes.

Johns (1991) define that needs analysis is a first step that can provide the validity and relevancy in designing curriculum.

Robinson (1991) pointed out that needs is what the learners lacks, for example, learners do not know or cannot do something related to the language they are learning.

Brinkerhoff and Gill (1994) regards that needs analysis is to determine the knowledge and skills which are necessary to achieve the learning goals.

Nunan (1994, p 54) states that “needs analysis is a set of procedures for specifying the parameters of a course of study. Such parameters include the criteria and rationale for grouping learners, the selection and sequencing of course content, methodology, course length, and intensity and duration.” Needs analysis is therefore a significant factor that the educators or practitioners should discover in order to design and develop the effective courses.

Brown (1995; 2001) stated that needs analysis is an integral part of the systematic process of gathering information and curriculum development, particularly in the field of education.

Yalden (2012) mentioned that needs analysis is to analyze the line between learners’ wants and learners’ needs in designing and developing the courses.

Al-Hamlan and Baniabdelrahman (2015) stated that needs analysis is the first step to develop the teaching materials, learning activities, and assessment strategies and to assess the effectiveness in the language teaching field.

Erdoğan and Güler (2017) referred that needs analysis is the process of identifying needs in order to make the development possible in both of short term and of long term and to make it permanent.

In summary, needs can be defined as a gap between the learners’ current output and the learners’ desired (want) output. Needs analysis is the empirical process to analyze the learners’ needs, problems, and wants in order to achieve purposes in designing and developing the course or program to be successful in language teaching and learning.

Several scholars have categorized types of needs analysis from various perspectives. The three models of needs analysis which are gained much recognition by researchers are described as the follows.

1. Target Situation Analysis (TSA)

This type focuses on the learners’ needs at the end of the course (Robinson, 1991), that is, what the learners require to do in the target situation. Munby (1978) is the first specialist who invented the famous model named “Communication Needs Processor (CNP)” which is an influential approach in the target situation analysis (Jordan, 1997). Munby’s Model of Need Analysis (CNP) emphasized on what the learners’ need of the performance after a course. This approach begins with the processing of “input” which is the information about the learners (participants) that are set out under eight variables such as purposive domain, setting, interaction, instrumentality, dialect, communicative event, communicative key, and target level. Then, the participants take the activities with communicative keys and decide which alternative ways of processing, namely, (1) specification of syllabus content by focusing on micro-skills, (2) specification by focusing on micro-functions, and (3) specification by focusing on linguistic forms is appropriate to them (Munby, 1978; Li, 2014).

2. Present Situation Analysis (PSA)

This type is what the learners already know. This approach analyses learner’s present situation and shows the gap between the present situation and the target situation. Present Situation Analysis aims to find out the learners’ language proficiency including strengths and weakness when the language course begins (Robinson, 1991; Li, 2014). There are three basic sources of information suggested by Richterich and Chancerel (1980): (1) the information about the students themselves, (2) the language-teaching organizations, and (3) the user-institution. Bloor (1984) stated that the Present Situation Analysis may be “learner-

centered” approach since it focuses on the learners’ future role in the target situation and aims to specify the language skills and knowledge that learner need to know.

3. Learning Situation Analysis (LSA)

This type focuses on what the learners want to learn (Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998). West (as cited in Songhori, 2008) claimed that Learning Situation Analysis includes the strategies that learners use to learn the language rather than what they need to learn. Hutchinson and Waters’ Model is a well-known approach of Learning Situation Analysis. Needs analysis model of Hutchinson and Waters (1987) consists of two parts: target situation needs and learning needs. Firstly, the target situation needs include necessities, lacks, and wants. Necessities are the necessary demand of the target situation. Lacks are the gap between the necessities and what the learner already knows. Wants are the learners’ subjective needs. Secondly, the learning needs are how learners learn. If it is about language education, it refers to how learners learn a language. Also, the learning needs include the learners’ motivation of learning a language, the learning resources, time and place, and learners’ personal information (Li, 2014). Needs analysis is a powerful tool to find the wants and needs of learners. The learner’s’ motivation will be enhanced if the teaching approaches, methods, techniques, and contents match the determined needs.

Consequently, course designer and course developer have to find out the learners’ needs, problems, and wants in order to shape the effective course design and development. Because the well-designed course which respond to learners’ interests and wants has a great deal to motivate learners to learn (Oliva, 2001). Therefore, the theme of needs analysis is used to address the needs of students and professors for better development of the doctor of Philosophy program in applied linguistics.

Methodology

Participants

There were two groups of participants in this study, that is, a group of university students and a group of professors. There were eight university students who are the current students in the PhD program of Applied Linguistics at a government university. There were six professors whose expertise are in the fields of Applied Linguistics, English language teaching, technology-based language teaching, and innovative education. Three of the professors are the external expert while the rest number are professors of the PhD program of Applied Linguistics. Purposive sampling was used to select the participants to gather meaningful data.

Research Instrument

The study employed a set of open-ended questions composed of needs, difficulties, and wants towards the teaching and learning of the PhD program in Applied Linguistics, for the interview. The IOC value was used to validate the validity of research instrument before using with the participants in this study.

Data Collection

The focus group interview was conducted with a set of open-ended questions. The interview lasted approximately sixty minutes. Participants were recorded their interview speech.

Data Analysis

The collected data is analyzed by means of content analysis.

Results

Participants were given 9 questions to discuss in the focus group interview. The recorded answers were transcribed and analyzed as the follows.

1. Needs of Ph.D. Students and Professors

Needs of Ph.D. students and professors towards a PhD program of Applied Linguistics involved three aspects that were online information, supported resources, and research community including psychological therapy space.

1) The program should provide more online information about upcoming events and course registration.

For example:

I suggested that they (students) should be able to get more information about course registration. (Panicha)

Program should put more information online. Like the activity that we did today and show it on Facebook. (Prathomwat)

2) The program should provide more books in the library and e-books in university's E-resource especially those related to the program and students' interests and dissertations.

For example:

We need a library that is necessary (support) for the program. The books that we would like to use are (available) in other universities. (Kultida and Chatchanan)

However, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Singhanat and Assoc. Prof. Dr. Songsri suggested that You could download a lot of research (articles) online on university E-resource. (Assoc. Prof. Dr. Singhanat)

We can ask the librarian to transfer the books from other libraries. (Assoc. Prof. Dr. Songsri)

3) The program should provide more close-knit research community in order to do activities with other Ph.D. students or advisors.

The curriculum should provide us a room to let us consult with the seniors and fellow students. (Panicha and Prathomwat)

We also need some psychological therapy (sessions) that can be done in the classroom or under a tree. (Watcharaporn)

Moreover, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Singhanat also recommended that

When he was in Australia. Students were taught how to sit (to work) properly. How they should be exercising. They need to take care of their mentality before they can graduate. (Assoc. Prof. Dr. Singhanat)

In conclusion, the needs of Ph.D. students and professors towards a PhD program of Applied Linguistics involved three aspects that included three areas, which were 1) providing more online information about upcoming events and course registration details in order to plan what students have to do in the period of time and advertise to people who interested in studying or attending the events of the program, 2) providing more books related to the students' interest and their dissertation topic in the faculty library and

university's E-resource, as this is for the convenience of students. However, the head of the program suggested that students might ask the librarian to transfer the books from other libraries where found, and 3) providing more research community activities including psychological therapy space in order to create an academic environment and help to care for students' mental state while studying before graduation.

2. Difficulties of Ph.D. Students and Professors

The difficulties of Ph.D. students towards a PhD program of Applied Linguistics were about their academic process in the program and time limitations.

For example:

I did not know my advisor at first. After I knew her, (I found) she was very friendly and we then discussed about research this made me feel better. (Prathomwat)

My advisor helps me with my difficulties. I planned to conduct three presentations since I heard about a student who was able to publish 11 research papers, and that has inspired me. (Prathomwat)

My difficulty is the timing – it was difficult to meet the deadline, for example, the timing for dissertation defense and graduation. (Pantipa)

I also had difficulty as the qualification exam was given quite early and I was not quite ready because I had enrolled for just four months. (Treesirin)

Nevertheless, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Songsri advised that the Master Degree program provided some subjects that the Ph.D. students can register in order to be ready for the qualification exam.

MA program have subjects that you (students) can register to prepare yourself for the qualification exam. (Assoc. Prof. Dr. Songsri)

The difficulties found from group discussion were the thorough academic process in the program that were the duration for dissertation defense, graduation and time limitations to meet the deadline for taking qualification exam. Nevertheless, the head of the program advised students to prepare for the qualification exam by registering the necessary subjects matters in the Master's degree courses and the students should consult with their advisor about the timeframe for each process and the possible graduation timeline.

3. Wants of Ph.D. Students and Professors

According to the group interview, there were no special requests from Ph.D. Students and professors for the program about the management of teaching and learning aspects. The students were extremely satisfied about the teaching and learning management of this program.

For example:

I had to conduct a research in the areas of applied linguistics. I learned how to conduct an advanced research. (Chatchanan)

I felt all of the environments are friendly here. All students became friend and I loved that. (Watcharaporn)

What I like is the management of the program. It was well planned. The head of the program set up the schedule to do the progress report and now was student's third

time for the progress report. They have steps like this and students were able to report the problem and get the solution to the problem. (Panicha)

Ajarn Songsri teaches her students not in the traditional way; she teaches us how to be an independent learner. We were urged to find information outside the classroom and she then told us whether the information was correct. (Usama)

The first time I applied from this course, I thought it was a coursework study and later found out that it was research based. She (Ajarn Songsri) thought it was really better (for the students). She wanted to produce students who become a good researcher. (Pantipa)

Overall, students were satisfied with the teaching and learning management in this program according to the information collected from the group discussion. Students got suitable opportunities to conduct an advanced research, had a friendly environment, received encouragement to be independent learners, and placed in a well-executed program.

Discussion and Conclusion

Needs analysis is used to identify gaps between the existing situation and the desired situation in the program development (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987; Kaufman & English, 1979; Robinson, 1991). The results pointed out that students perceive what the philosophy of program, faculty, and university are. Students then expect to be an active teacher and good independent researchers in the 21st century by applying their knowledge to be beneficial for mankind in their work fields after graduation. Consequently, they were impressed with the program since they registered to study in the program because of curriculum, modern instruction, offered courses, qualified professors, and friendly environment. Although they face with the difficult times while they are studying, they endure to overcome those obstacles because they realize what the qualified characteristic of PhD students are. The supports from program and professors are also the important things that students need. Noteworthy, students are satisfied with the support they always receive from program, advisors and program professors.

However, there are some points that students gave the suggestions for the program. Those are all what students need, but the program lacks such as the research community, online community, and e-resources. According to Richterich and Chancerel (1980) and Hutchinson and Waters (1987), these indicated the gap between the necessities and what the students are already offered from the program. The gathered information from Needs analysis benefits for professors and stake holders who are in charge of the program because it much help them to develop the program which respond to students' needs and wants. Likewise, Oliva (2001) stated that the well-designed and developed course has a great deal to motivate students to learn.

References

- Al-Hamlan, S. A., & Baniabdelrahman, A.A. (2015). A Needs Analysis Approach to EFL Syllabus Development for Second Grade Students in Secondary Education in Saudi Arabia: A Descriptive Analytical Approach to Students' Needs. *American International Journal of Contemporary Research*, 5(1), 118-145.
- Bloor, M. (1984). Identifying the components of a language syllabus: A problem for designers of courses in ESP or communication studies. In R. Williams, J. Swales, & J. Kirkman (Eds.), *Common ground-shared interests in ESP and communication studies* (pp. 15-24). Oxford: Pergamon Press.
- Brinkerhoff, R. O., & Gill, S. J. (1994). *The Learning Alliance*. San Francisco: Pfeiffer & Co.
- Brown, J. D. (1995). *The Elements of Language Curriculum: A Systematic Approach to Program Development*. Boston, MA: Heinle and Heinle.
- Brown, H. D. (2001). *Teaching by Principles: An Interactive Approach to Language Pedagogy* (2nd ed.). White Plains, NY: Longman.
- Dudley-Evans, T., & St John, M. J. (1998). *Developments in English for Specific Purposes: A multi-disciplinary approach*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.
- Erdoğan, P., & Güler, G. (2017). Needs Analysis in Program Development. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Invention*, 6(8), 62-66.
- Hutchinson, T., & Waters, A. (1987). *English for Specific Purposes*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.
- Johns, A. (1991). English for specific purposes: its history and contribution. In M. Celce-Murcia (Ed.), *Teaching English as a second or foreign language* (pp.67-77). Boston, MA: Heinle & Heinle.
- Jordan, R. R. (1997). *English for academic purposes: A guide and resource book for teachers*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.
- Kaufman, R., & English, F. (1979). *Needs assessment: Concept and application*. Educational Technology. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Educational Technology Publications.
- Lepetit, D., & Cichocki, W. (2005). Teaching languages to future health professionals: A needs assessment study. In H.M. Long (Ed.) *Second language needs analysis*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.
- Li, J. (2014). Needs Analysis: An Effective Way in Business English Curriculum Design. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 4(9), 1869-1874.
- Munby, J. (1978). *Communicative Syllabus Design*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.
- Nunan, D. (1994). *The learner-centered curriculum*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.
- Oliva, Peter F. (2001). *Developing the curriculum* (5th ed.). New York, NY: Longman.
- Richterich R., & Chancerel, L. (1980). *Identifying the needs of adults learning foreign language*. Oxford, England: Pergamon Press.

- Richterich, R., & Chancerel, J. J. (1987). *Identifying the needs of adults learning a foreign language*. Oxford, England: Prentice Hall.
- Robinson, P. (1991). *ESP Today: A Practitioner's Guide*. Hemel Hempstead, England: Prentice Hall.
- Sarnrattana, U. (2012). Needs assessment for curriculum and instruction development. *Journal of curriculum and instruction*. 2(1-2), 2-17.
- Yalden, J. (2012). *Principles of course design for language teaching*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.

Authors

Orrathip Geerativudhipong
PhD. Candidate, Mahidol University, Thailand
E-mail: orrathip@hotmail.com

Watcharaporn Rattanajaru
PhD. Candidate, Mahidol University, Thailand
E-mail: kisawadkorn.w@gmail.com

Treesirin Chaloemkiti
PhD. Candidate, Mahidol University, Thailand
E-mail: Snowwhite021@hotmail.com

Niramon Rattanasongkhroh
PhD. Candidate, Mahidol University, Thailand
E-mail: niramon.r@psu.ac.th

Usama Sangserm
PhD. Candidate, Mahidol University, Thailand
E-mail: usama.san@mahidol.edu