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ENGLISH FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES (2nd Semester)

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This Handout is a synthesis of papers and university handouts that were adapted to our students' needs. These sources are mentioned in the list of references

NEEDS ANALYSIS IN ESP

1. INTRODUCTION

In all ESP teaching situations, we must start by considering the needs of the learners and what they have to do in the target situation (Flook, 1993).

The process of needs analysis often entails collecting information for the sake of having the necessary bases to develop a course which will meet the needs of a particular group of students. In this regard, Richards and Platt (1992**:**242) state that NA 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."* Consequently, a teacher engaged in the process of NA is required to gather information about 'what' the learner need and 'how' he can learn. The above definitions imply the existence of different types of needs that the ESP course teacher should take into consideration while designing a course.

2. TYPES OF NEEDS

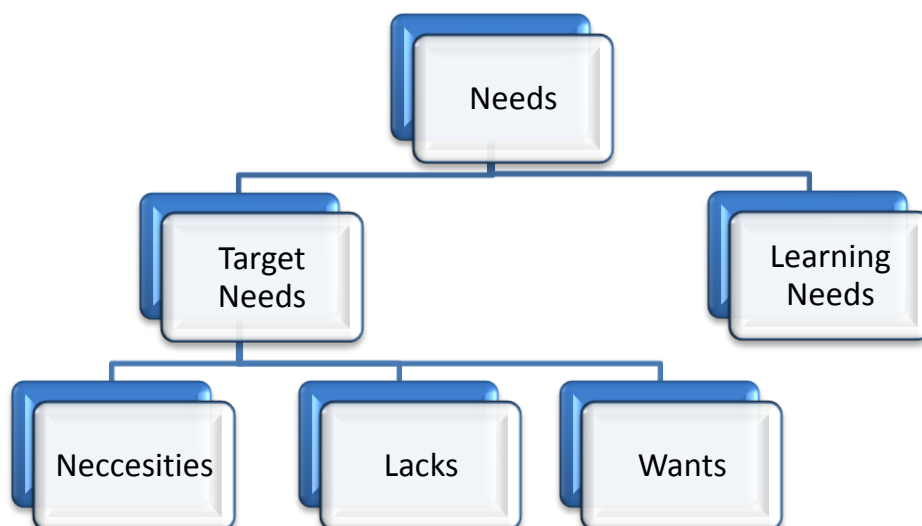Hutchinson and Waters identify two types of needs as illustrated in the figure below

Figure 1. Types of Needs (Hutchinson and Waters 1987)

2.1 TARGET NEEDS

According to Hutchinson and Waters (1987) target needs are mainly related to 'what the learner need to do in the target situation'. In order to answer this statement, ESP practitioner should also gather information about learners' necessities, lacks and wants.

- **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 already know and what they 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 learners' personal expectations and hopes towards acquiring English, i.e. what they would like to gain from the language course. Usually these needs are very personal; therefore they are sometimes called 'subjective'. In fact, these wants are very real, and may conflict with the necessities as perceived by the employer. Therefore ways must be found to accommodate them.

In this respect, individuals' wants cannot all be accounted for; however, the wants of the majority can be discussed and partially met.

2.2 LEARNING NEEDS

Learning needs involve an answer to the question: How are we going to the destination?. They can be defined as:*"Factors that affect the learning like attitude, motivation, awareness, personality, learning styles and strategies, together with the social background"* (Xiao, 2007:2). Learning needs concerns about the route between

the starting point (lacks) and the destination (necessities). For examples, learners may be greatly motivated in the subject or work, but may completely lose interests with the long, boring, and old teaching material. The learning process should be enjoyable, fulfilling, manageable, and generative. It is not concerned with knowing, but with the learning. The concept of "learning needs" put forward by Hutchinson & Waters and their analysis of "learning needs" have been proved to be fairly useful in practice because learning needs clarify the means through which learners proceed to achieve their target needs starting with realizing their lacks. As a result, in the process of leaning, learner's needs should always be taken into consideration. Course designers need to analyze the learner' learning needs according to their motivation, the conditions of the learning situation, and their existing knowledge and skills.

3. NEEDS ANALYSIS PROCEDURES

Needs analysis has been introduced into language teaching in the 1960's through ESP movement. It is a set of procedures for collecting information about learners needs.

Understanding learners' needs can contribute to successful course planning. Hence, the Purpose of Needs Analysis is:

- To find out what language skills a learner needs
- To help determine if an existing course adequately addresses the needs of potential students
- To determine which students are most in need for training in particular language skills
- To identify students lacks
- To identify students wants and expectations
- To collect information about a particular problem learners are experiencing.

How to conduct needs analysis?

In ESP, identifying what a course should contain and how it should be run is determined by the use of different sources and methods to gather data about the situation. The table below illustrates the main sources and methods for needs analysis.

Sources for NAs	Methods of NA
Published & unpublished literature	Interviews
Participating or administrative stuffs (materials)	Participant observation
Former students	non participant observation
Learners	Questionnaires
Teachers	Triangulated methods
Domain experts (ESP researchers, linguists, subject specialists)	
Triangulated sources	

APPROACHES TO ESP COURSE DESIGN

According to Hutchinson and Waters, 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 experience, whose ultimate aim is to lead the learners to a particular sate of knowledge. This entails the use of the theoretical and empirical information available to produce a syllabus, to develop a methodology for teaching those materials and to establish evaluation procedures by which progress towards the specified goals will be measured.

Three main approaches to course design can be identified: language-centred, skills-centred, and learning centred.

1. LANGUAGE-CENTRED APPROACH: (PERFORMANCE)

Language- centred approach is the simplest and more familiar kind to English teachers. It is an approach that focuses on the linguistic performance of the learner in the target situation (Hutchinson and Waters, 1987: 65). This approach aims to draw direct connection between target situation and the content of ESP course. It proceeds as follows:
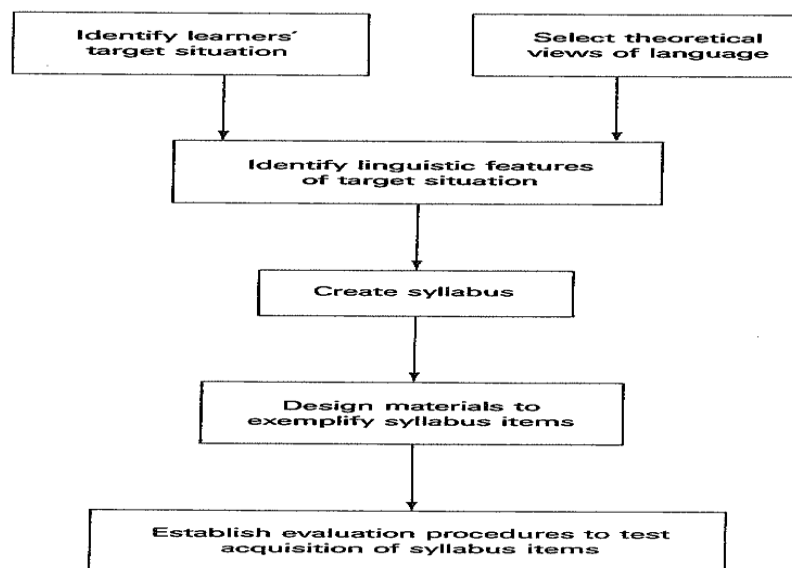

Figure. 1 Language- Centred Approach to ESP Course Design

However, it has a number of weaknesses:

1. It starts from the learner and their needs. It might be considered a learner-centred approach. The learner is simply used as a means of identifying the target situation.

2. It is a static and inflexible procedure, which can take little account of the conflicts and contradictions that are inherent in any human endeavor.

3. It appears to be systematic. The fact that knowledge has been systematically analysed and systematically presented does not in any way imply that it will be systematically learnt. Learners have to make the system meaningful to themselves.And unfortunately we have to admit that we do not know enough about how the mind actually goes about creating its internal system of knowledge.

4. It gives no acknowledgement to factors which must inevitably play a part in the creation of any course. Data is not important in itself.

5. The lg-centred analysis of target situation data is only at the surface level. It reveals very little about the competence that underlies the performance.

This course design fails to recognise the fact that, learners being people, learning is not a straightforward, logical process. A lg-centred approach says: 'This is the nature of the target situation performance and that will determine the ESP course.'

2. SKILLS-CENTRED APPROACH (COMPETENCE)

This approach aims at helping learners to develop skills and strategies which will continue after the ESP course. Its aim is not only to provide language knowledge but to make the learners into better processors of information. The figure below presents this model.
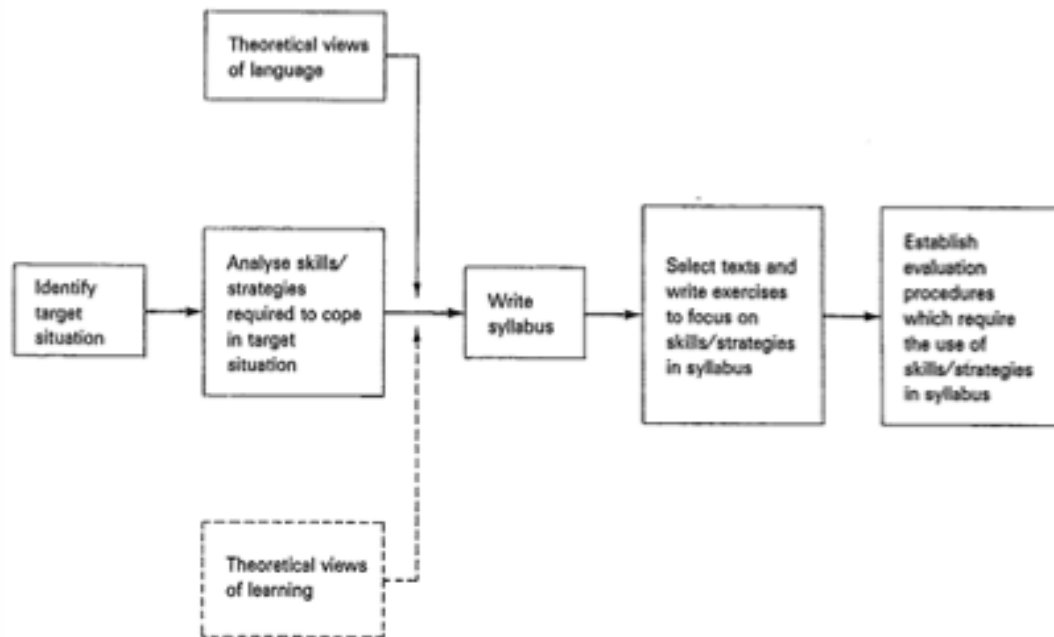
Theoretical views of language

Identify target situation → Analyse skills/ strategies required to cope in target situation → Write syllabus → Select texts and write exercises to focus on skills/strategies in syllabus → Establish evaluation procedures which require the use of skills/strategies in syllabus

Theoretical views of learning

Figure.2: Skills Centred- Approach to an ESP Course Design

Hutchinson and Waters (1987) state that the role needs analysis in this approach is to help the ESP practitioner discover the potential knowledge and competences of the learner, and their perspectives of the target situation.

Skills centred model view language in terms of how the mind of the learner processes it rather than as an entity in itself. In addition, it tries to build on the positive factors that the learners bring to the course, rather than just on the negative idea of 'lacks'. Finally, it frames its objectives in open-ended terms, so enabling learners to achieve at least something. Yet, in spite of its concern for the learner, the skills-centred approach still approaches the learner as a *user* of language rather as a *learner* of language.

3. A LEARNING-CENTRED APPROACH (COMPETENCE)

A learning-centred course differs from a traditional teaching-centred (language /skills centred) course in several ways (Weimer, 2002).

First, the balance of control in a learning-centred class will change. What does this mean? A common belief is that in a teaching,-centred environment, where teachers

are seen to be the only source of information and are likely authoritative, the feeling of responsibility for learning is higher. This is why, in case some students' fail to learn, teachers blame themselves because they believe that good learning depends entirely on good teaching. Consequently, teaching-centred courses designers ensure control over many aspects of the course.

In contrast, in a learning-centred situation, students are ultimately responsible for their own learning using different strategies. For example they have to engage in assigned learning activities and exert the effort required to learn. So if students are supposed to take responsibility for their own learning, it is time to give them more control over the way learning experiences are structured. In addition to this, teachers delivering a learning-centred need to control aspects of the course to ensure that they meet their professional responsibility to create a course that addresses certain learning outcomes. In the same line, students need to control aspects of the learning environment to meet individual learning goals and maintain motivation.

The idea behind this approach is that the learner is the main actor in the learning process for this to happen it takes the following principles:

- ✓ Learning is totally determined by the learner who uses his knowledge and skills to make sense of new information.
- ✓ Learning is not just a mental process; it is a process of negotiation between individuals and society.
- ✓ Course design is negotiation process in which both the target situation influences the features of the syllabus and also it's a dynamic process in which means and recourses vary from time to time.

Despite the fact of being: a language, learning, or skills- centred approach; making the ESP course as dynamic and flexible as much as possible is the most important thing. Hence, a clear understanding of students' needs and the demands of the target situation will serve in developing the appropriate materials and methodologies needed to function effectively in a given domain.

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