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Level: LMD3
Module: ESP
Title of the Course: Needs Analysis
Time Required to Cover the Course: Two Sessions (3 Hours)

<u>Needs Analysis</u>

1. Introduction

Finding out about and analyzing the needs of the students is vital in ESP teaching. In fact one of the main contributions of ESP to the wider world of English Language Teaching has been the development of thorough needs analysis. John Munby's ***Communicative Syllabus Design*** (1978) is, probably, the most thorough and widely known work on needs analysis. In his work, Munby introduced a very well detailed set of procedures for discovering target situation needs. He called this set of procedures the **Communication Needs Processor (CNP).** The CNP is formed by a group of questions related to key communication variables (topic, participants, medium etc.) which can be used to spot the target language needs of any group of learners.

This work was considered to be a turning point in the development of ESP. Thanks to the elaboration of the CNP, it became easy to identify the needs of any group of learners: all the course designer had to do was to operate it. However, Communicative Syllabus Design proved to be a turning point in quite another way. By taking the analysis to its logical conclusion, it showed the ultimate sterility of a language-centered approach, to needs analysis. Why was this so?

The answer lies in 'what we mean by needs? 'In the language-centered approach, the answer to this question would be 'the ability to comprehend and/or produce the linguistic features of the target situation', for example the ability to understand the passive voice. Thus, what the CNP produces is a list of the linguistic features of the target situation'. But there is much more to needs than this.

Hutchinson (1991:54) states that there are two kinds of needs: target needs and learning needs. The former implies what the learner needs to do in the target situation and the latter what he needs to do in order to learn.

2. Target Needs

'Target needs' is like an umbrella term, which in practice hides a number of important distinctions. It is more useful to look at the target situation in terms of *necessities*, *lacks* and *wants*.

a- Necessities

We can call 'necessities' the type of need determined by the demand of the target situation; that is, what the learner has to know in order to function effectively in the target situation.

The following example of this procedure is adapted from Munby (1978), and it shows the necessities for a learner who works as a head waiter in a hotel.

Sample communication activities	Related 'micro-functions'	Language forms (productive)
Attending to customers' arrival	1.Intention 2.Prohibit 3.Direct etc.	I will bring the menu. I am afraid we are full/ closed. Please follow me/ will you sit here please.
Attending to customers' order	1. Suggestive 2. Advise 3. Describe etc.	May I suggest the……………..? May I recommend the ……….? You may find the……….. Too spicy.
Serving the order	1. Question	………..for you, sir/madam? The………………………………..?

Figure 1: A needs analysis using the CNP

b- Lacks

To identify necessities alone, however, is not enough, since the concern in ESP is with the needs of particular learners. You also need to know what the learner knows already, so that you can then decide which of the necessities the learner lacks. The target proficiency in other words, needs to be matched against the existing proficiency of the learners. The gap between the two can be referred to as the learner's lacks (Hutchinson, Waters and Breen 1979).

c- Wants

So far, we have considered target needs only in an objective sense, with the actual learners playing no active role. But the learners too, have a view as to what their needs are. As Richterich (1984:29) comments:

'…a need does not exist independent of a person. It is people who build their images of their needs on the basis of data relating to themselves and their environment.'

Learners may well have a clear idea of the 'necessities' of the target situation: they will certainly have a view as to their 'lacks'. But it is quite possible that the learners' views will conflict with the perceptions of other interested parties: course designers, sponsors, teachers…etc.

2. Learning Needs

Till now needs have been considered only in terms of target situation needs. We have been considering the question: 'what knowledge and abilities will the learners require in order to be able to able to perform to the required degree of competence in the target situation?' Considering the starting point as (lacks) and the destination (necessities), although there might be some disputes over what the destination should be (wants). What has not been clarified yet is the route. How are we going to get from our starting point to the destination? This will lead us to speak about another type of need: learning needs.

To understand what is meant by learning needs, let us look a little more closely at what happens in the analysis of target situation needs.

In looking at the target situation, the ESP course designer is asking the question: 'what does the expert communicator need to know in order to function effectively in this situation?' This information

May be recorded in terms of language items, skills, strategies, subject knowledge etc

What the analysis cannot do, however, is show *how* the expert communicator learnt the language items, skills and strategies that he or she uses(Smith,1984). Analyzing what people do tells you little, if anything, about how they learnt to do it.Yet , the whole ESP process is concerned not with knowing or doing, but with learning. It is naïve to base a course design simply on the target objectives, just as it is naïve to think that a journey can be planned solely in terms of the starting point and the destination. The needs, potential and constraints of the route(i.e. the learning situation) must also bet taken into account, if we ar going to have any useful analysis of learner needs.

Let us say, we are preparing material for a group of learners who need to read texts on systems. Most of the available texts are long and dull. Should these texts be used for ESP? We would say no. The learners' motivation in the target situation will not necessarily carry over to the ESP classroom. They may well have to read very dull texts in their work or studies, but they probably have some strong motivation to do so. This does not imply that they will accept or learn from dull texts in ESP. It may be more appropriate to look for texts that are more interesting or humorous in order to generate the motivation needed to learn English (Hutchitson and Waters, 1983)

To sum it up, the target is not a reliable indicator of what is needed or useful in the ESP learning situation. The target situation analysis can determine the destination; it can also act as a compass on the journey to give general direction, but we must choose our route according to the vehicles and guides available (i.e. the condition of the learning situation), the existing roads within the learner's mind (i.e. their knowledge, skills and strategies) and the learners' motivation for travelling.

2.1 Analysing Learning Needs

To analyse learning needs, we can use a similar checklist to that used for target situation analysis:

-A Framework for Analysing Learning Needs

❖ **Why are the learners taking the course?**

- Compulsory or optional;

- Apparent need or not;

- Are status, money, promotion involved?

- What do learners think they will achieve?

- What is their attitude towards the ESP course? Do they want to improve their English or do their resent the time they spend on it?

❖ **How do the Learners learn?**

- What is their learning background?

- What is their concept of learning and teaching?

- What methodology will appeal to them?

❖ **What sources are available**

- Number and professional competence of teachers;

- Attitude of teachers to ESP;

- Teachers' knowledge of and attitude to the subject content/materials;

- Aids; opportunities for out-of class activities.

❖ **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?

❖ **Where will the ESP course take place?**

- Are the surroundings pleasant, dull, noisy, cold etc?

❖ **When will the ESP course take place?**

- Time of day;

- Every day/ once a week;

3. Conclusion

In this chapter we have looked at the most characteristic feature of ESP course design-needs analysis. We have tried to show that it is a complex process, involving much more than simply looking at what the learners will have to do in the target situation. Most of all, we have tried to stress both that target situation needs and learning needs must be taken into account. Analysis of target situation needs is concerned with language *use*. But language use is only part of the story. We also need to know about language learning. Analysis of the target situation can tell us what people do with language. What we also need to know is how people learn to do what they do with language. We need, in other words, a learning-centred approach to needs analysis.

References

Harding, K. (2007). English for Specific Purposes. Oxford University Press

Hutchinson,T. and Waters, A. (1987). English for Specific Purposes. A learning-centred approach.Cambridge University Press.