

# Defining the Context and Needs Analysis

English for Specific Purposes  
Materials Development

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# Why do we need to define the context?

- Knowing the culture of the students we are designing a course for, its purpose and the views of the community will affect the objectives of the course
- Constraints of the context will offer a clear direction for formulating realistic and appropriate goals
- Environment, teaching factors, teaching resources, institutional factors

# Needs analysis: What and Why?

Iwai *et al.* (1999), the term needs analysis generally

- ➔ refers to the activities that are involved in collecting information that will serve as the basis for developing a curriculum that will meet the needs of a particular group of students.
- ➔ aims to:
  - Help determine if a language course addresses the needs of potential students
  - Identify needs of certain professionals, the tasks they will perform and the language characteristics of certain tasks
  - Identify a gap between what students are able to do and what they need to be able to do
  - Assess the level of language acquisition
  - Determine cultural, political personal characteristics of students

# Definitions of 'needs'

- Subjective needs (found through participants' likes and reports) and objective needs (found through objective measures such as tests/interviews etc)
- 'a gap between current state of affairs and future state of affairs'
- Desires demands, expectations, constraints
- Planning an ESL curriculum should seek to 'enable students to critically examine and become active in shaping their own roles in it' Richards, 2001

# Typology of needs

- Target needs/product-related needs (what (language skills) the learners need to do in the target situation)
- Learning needs /process-related needs (what the learner needs to do in order to learn or what the learner needs to do to reach his learning objectives)

# Food for thought

- Not all language learners are aware of their needs
- In EFL high school contexts, students may not have immediate needs;
- The curriculum relies on administrators and educators as well as students' Perceived and Present needs as well as potential and unrecognised needs

# 1. Target needs

- Hutchinson & Waters (1983), Macalister and Nation (2010) divide target needs into:
- Necessities (what the learner has to know in order to function effectively in the target situation → what is necessary in the learners' use of language?)
- Lacks (what the learner knows already and what do they lack?)
- Wants (what do learners desire to learn? Are what learners want to learn the same as what they actually need to learn?)

# Target situation analysis vs Present situation analysis

- TSA: Identification of future needs can be described in terms of situations, skills, functions, topics or communicative functions, grammar, vocabulary
- PSA: Students strengths, weaknesses, institutional preferences etc.



# A Target Situation Analysis Framework

- Why is the language needed?
- How will the language be used? (medium, channel, type of text/discourse)
- What will the content areas be? (subject, level)
- Who will the learners use the language with?
- Where will the language be used? (physical setting, human & linguistic context)
- When will the language be used?

## 2. Learning Needs

- What knowledge and abilities will the learners require in order to be able to perform to the required degree of competence in the target situation?
- What does the expert communicator need to know in order to function effectively in the (targeted) situation?
- The needs probably include: what language items, skills, strategies or subject knowledge learners must have to be able to use the language effectively in the targeted situation(s).

# A Framework of Learning Needs Analysis

- Why are the learners taking the course?
- How do the learners learn?
- What resources are available?
- Who are the learners?
- Where/When will the course take place?

# Users of needs analysis

- Curriculum officers in the ministry of education
- Teachers of the new curriculum
- Learners taught in the curriculum
- Writers writing new textbooks
- Trainers responsible for designing training programs-private institutes
- Employers interested in improving job performance

# Procedures for conducting needs analysis

- Triangulation is used
- Test data
- Reports by teachers
- Samples of student writing
- Portfolios
- Conferences, journals, diaries
- Expert opinions
- Surveys
- Related literature
- Interviews and questionnaires with students/teachers

# Target population

- Learners
- Teachers
- Academics
- Employers
- Policy makers
- Parents
- Community agencies
- Policy makers
- Ministry of education officials

# Methods for needs assessment

<b>Necessities</b>	<b>Lacks</b>	<b>Wants</b>
Self report	Self report	Self report
Proficiency test, placement test	tests	Questionnaires, interviews with students
Portfolio analysis	Employers' task analysis	Journals/diaries
Employers' task analysis	Analysis of interviews/texts	
Questionnaires, interviews with employers/principals	Portfolio analysis	

# Group work

- How might you analyse the needs of secondary school learners?
- Make an analysis of your own learners' needs using the Framework for analysing target and learning needs.
- Study the textbook or materials you use for reference in developing your materials. Try to reconstruct the results of the needs analysis it is based on.



# DISCUSS

- **Is it always possible to do a needs analysis before the course? Can you think of situations when this is not possible? How can you address this problem?**
- **‘What learners say they want is more important in determining course content than what others say they need’. Do you agree?**
- **Have you ever done a needs analysis for a class that you taught? How did you do it?**

# Now

- **Each group should write down 4 questions that would be part of a needs analysis instrument (interview-questionnaire etc).**