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
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

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Necessities</th>
<th>Lacks</th>
<th>Wants</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self report</td>
<td>Self report</td>
<td>Self report</td>
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<tr>
<td>Proficiency test, placement test</td>
<td>tests</td>
<td>Questionnaires, interviews with students</td>
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<td>Portfolio analysis</td>
<td>Employers’ task analysis</td>
<td>Journals/diaries</td>
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<td>Analysis of interviews/texts</td>
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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).