

Analyzing Students Perceived Needs: the Case of 1st year students of the Preparatory School to Economics, Commerce and Management Sciences of Annaba Algeria

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to investigate the importance of analyzing students' perceived needs of our population who are 1st year students of the Preparatory School to Economics, Commerce and Management Sciences of Annaba Algeria.

We seek to spot the light on detecting and analyzing students' needs before the startup of the English course. We assume that analyzing students' needs and taking them into consideration in the elaboration of the course or during the course will lead to enhancing their level of motivation and to making the teaching more fruitful and effective.

In our investigation, we have used a questionnaire as a research tool. We have distributed 120 copies to our population (1st year students). We have collected 97 answered copies that constitute the basis of our study and analysis.

Key words: English for Specific Purposes, Needs Analysis, Course Design

INTRODUCTION

Aim of the Study

When we talk about ESP, we must stress upon the nature of the relationship that exists between the teacher and the ESP learner.

In fact the ESP learner is like a client; he knows what he needs and he will not feel happy if he gets what he does not need.

It is the duty of the ESP teacher to fulfill the need of the ESP learner; he should give him what he needs and wants.

The only way that helps detect the needs and wants of ESP students is needs analysis; it helps identify the necessities, lacks and wants of a given population.

Our case of study is analyzing students perceived needs for making the teaching of English for this population more effective. Because the more we analyze the needs of a given population the more we are fulfilling and satisfying these needs and hence making these students more interested and motivated to learn English.

Theoretical Background

1. Needs analysis

1.1 Definition of Needs and Needs Analysis

Needs and needs analysis are associated with job or study requirements, learners' wants and motivation and institutions decisions about what is needed to be learnt.

According to Widdowson (1978) need is the goal and objective for which learners of English attend the ESP course. He states: "Needs can refer to the students study or job requirements that is what they have to be able to do at the end of their language course".

Mackay and Mountford (1978) define needs as: "Needs can mean what the user institution or society at large regards as necessary and desirable to be learnt from a program of language instruction". According to them it is the institution or society that decides about the need of the learner. This need might be for some societies the transfer of science and technology that are written in English for example.

Brindley (1989) makes a clear distinction between objective and subjective needs. Objective needs are derivable from different kinds of factual information about learners and their use of language in real life, communication situations as well as their current language proficiency and language difficulty. Subjective needs refer to the cognitive and affective needs of the learner. They are derivable from information about his affective and cognitive parameters such as: personality, confidence, attitudes, learners' wants and expectations with regard to the learning of English.

Nunan (1988) sees needs analysis mainly as information collection process. He states: "Techniques and procedures for collecting information to be used in syllabus design are referred to as needs analysis"

Richards, Platt J and Platt, H (1992) definition of needs analysis seems to be close to Nunan's (1988) one; they look to needs analysis as: "The process of determining the needs for which a learner requires a language and arranging the needs according to priorities".

From these definitions, one can conclude that needs analysis is helpful before the design of any course to learners. It can lead course designers to focus on what is needed and motivating for them.

1.2 Models of Needs Analysis

1.2.1 Target Needs Analysis

Under Target Needs, Hutchinson and Waters (1987) identify necessities, lacks and wants:

a) Necessities:

Necessities for Hutchinson and Waters are the type of need determined by the demands of the target situation; the need to know the linguistic features – discoursal, functional, structural, lexical – which are commonly used in the situation identified. For example the Analyzing Students Perceived Needs: the Case of 1st year students of the Preparatory School to Economics, Commerce and Management Sciences of Annaba Algeria
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necessities of a businessman might be understanding business letters, communicating effectively at sales conferences, to get the necessary information about sales catalogues and so on.

b) Lacks:

For Hutchinson, Waters and Breen (1979) necessities alone are not enough to identify the needs of an ESP learner. They stress upon matching the target proficiency against the existing proficiency of the learner. The gap between the two can be referred to as the learner's lacks.

c) Wants:

Unlike necessities and lacks which are factual and objective needs, wants or the want of an ESP learner is totally subjective and can vary from one learner to another. Hutchinson and Waters (1987:56) state: "It is quite possible that the learners' views will conflict with the perception of other interested parties: course designers, sponsors, teachers".

A course designer might include in the course some authentic material / report of an accident that took place where an ESP learner works, this report might create a bad feeling and frustration to this worker and which consequently affect negatively his motivation. Hence as Hutchinson and Waters (1987:57) argue: "Bearing in mind the importance of learner motivation in the learning process, learners perceived wants cannot be ignored".

Hutchinson and Waters Target Needs Analysis (TNA) is based on gathering information about the target situation. They have established the following framework as guidelines for needs analysts:

Why is the language needed?

- for study;
- for work;

- for training;
- for a combination of these;
- for some other purpose, eg, status, examination, promotion

How will the language be used?

- medium: speaking, writing, reading etc;
- channel: eg. telephone, face to face
- types of text or discourse: eg, academic texts, lectures, informal conversations, technical manuals, catalogues

What will the content areas be?

- subjects:eg, medicine, biology, architecture, shipping, commerce, engineering
- level: eg, technician, craftsman, postgraduate, secondary school

Who will the learners use the language with?

- native speaker or non-native
- level of knowledge of receiver: eg, expert, layman, student;
- relationship: eg, colleague, teacher, customer, superior, subordinate

Where will the language be used?

- physical setting: eg, office, lecture theater, hotel, workshop, library
- human context: eg, alone, meetings, demonstration, on telephone
- linguistic context: eg, in own country, abroad,

When will the language be used?

- concurrently with the ESP course or subsequently
- frequently, seldom, in small amounts, in large chunks

This overall framework helps the needs analyst in drawing a clear picture about the target situation.

1.2.2 Learning Needs Analysis

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Hutchinson and Waters see that it is not enough to take into consideration the target needs only. They state: " we have been considering the question ' 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? Using our analogy of the ESP course as a journey, what we have done so far is to consider the starting point (lacks) and the destination (necessities)...what we have not considered yet is the route. How are we going to get from our starting point to the destination? This indicates another kind of need: learning needs". They consider any needs analysis that excludes the learning needs as incomplete and does not lead to clear knowledge of the learner's real needs. They state: " 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 be taken into account, if we are going to have any useful analysis of learner needs". For analysing learning needs, Hutchinson and Waters propose the use of a similar checklist to that used for target situation analysis:

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 they resent the time they have to spend on it?

How do the learners learn?

- what is their learning background?
- what is their concept of teaching and learning?
- what methodology will appeal to them?
- what sort of techniques are likely to bore/alienate them?

What resources are available?

- number and professional competence of teachers;
- attitude of teachers to ESP;
- teachers' knowledge of and attitude to the subject content;

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- 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 is their socio-cultural background?
- 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 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;
- full-time/part-time;
- concurrent with need or pre-need

This checklist is helpful in guiding the needs analyst in analysing the learning needs. It helps him know well the environment where the ESP course takes place.

METHODOLOGY

Research Population

Our research population are 1st year students of the Preparatory School to Economics, Commerce and Management Sciences of Annaba Algeria.

These students study two years in this preparatory school; they get prepared at this school before joining the superior schools of Management, Economics and Commerce of Algiers Algeria. English is one of the most important subjects given to the students at this school.

Time of the Study

Our study has taken place in the period between September 2014 and December 2014.

Research Tool

We have used a questionnaire as a research tool for our investigation. We have distributed 120 copies and we have got back 97 answered ones that constitute the basis of our analysis.

The questionnaire is written in English but during its distribution all the questions have been explained and clarified to the participants who have also been given the freedom to choose the language they want in replying on the questions.

The questionnaire contains these rubrics:

- 1 Personal information about the participants
- 2 Current mastery of English

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3 Importance of English for study and work

RESULTS

1 Personal information about the participants

The total number of participants who replied on the questionnaire is 97.

Age	Sex
Between 18 and 20	81 Female and 16 Male

2 Current mastery of English

2.1 Results of Q 1

What is your general mastery of English?			
100%	75%	50%	25%
00	28	43	26

2.2 Results of Q 2

Which of these skills you master better? Classify in order of importance giving 1 to the most important to 4 to the least important?	
Speaking	18%
Writing	23%
Reading	28%
Listening	31%

2.3 Results of Q 3

What are the problems that you have with every skill?			
Speaking	Writing	Reading	listening
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I cannot explain what I want to say - Shortage of information about some subjects - I am shy - I find difficulty in pronunciation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Grammatical mistakes - Spelling mistakes - Shortage of vocabulary - I forget the article 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Pronunciation - I cannot read the difficult words - I am too slow when I read 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - When people speak rapidly I do not grasp - Less concentration

3 Importance of English for study and work

3.1 Results of Q 1

Do you see that the mastery of English will help you in your study?	
Yes : 96	No: 01
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - It is an international language - It will help us understand the economy of USA and China - It helps me to be more cultivated - It is important in economics - It will help me pursue higher studies - All the world uses English - The books we need are in English - We use the economics terms in English - New businessmen use English - English of economics will help me 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - No because my domain of study can be studied in French

3.2 Results of Q 2

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What type of English you need more in your study?	
Business English	60%
General English	10%
Business and General English	30%

3.3 Results of Q 3

Where are you going to work when you finish your study?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Banking - Company - Marketing - Technology - Sonatrach (Algerian oil company) - Immigration to Qatar or USA - I have not yet decided I do not know

3.4 Results of Q4

Do you see that you are going to use English in your future work?	
Yes 87	No 10
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Especially if I work abroad - It is the world's language - All the managers that I will work with speak English - Foreign countries accept only English speaking managers - I will be able to read documents and to speak with my clients - I will meet people from all the world corners - I will work in USA - Yes because we are in a globalised world therefore companies exchange information, data and even workers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - No I will go to France I will use only French - I will work in Algerian companies, I will need only French

Analysis and Discussion of the Results

1 Personal information about the participants

The age of participants ranges between 18 and 20. This indicates that this population is young and not mature enough as far as their replies on questions about their needs after finishing their study are concerned. But what can be seen good as for the age of this population is the homogeneity. Having a homogenous group helps a lot in teaching.

The sex of this population is 78% female and 22% male. This indicates that the teacher should be gentle and not tough with them because the female sex is the majority.

2 Current mastery of English

2.1 General mastery of English?

67% of the population master English between 25% and 50%. 33% of the population declare that they master it at 75%. So we can say that the majority of participants have a medium or upper medium level in English.

2.2 Mastery of the four skills

Our research population masters:

Listening at **31%**

Reading at **28%**

Writing at **23%**

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Speaking at 18%

What can be noted about the percentage of mastery of the different skills is the closeness between them. The current teacher hence should make a balance between the four skills and he should not neglect any one.

2.3 Problems with every skill

With **speaking**: they have problems with pronunciation and they cannot express what they want in English.

With **reading**: they have also a problem of pronunciation and they sometimes pronounce some words in French.

With **listening**: they do not understand all what is said especially when the speaker of English speaks too fast. When there is noise in the class they do not also understand.

With **writing**: they make grammatical and spelling mistakes

3 Importance of English for study and for work

4.1 Importance of English for their study

99% of the population declare that the mastery of English is helpful for their study; they say that English is an international language, it will help them understand the economy of the developed countries like USA and China.

01% of the population see that English is not needed in their study but rather French which is helpful.

4.2 The type of English needed for their study

Three types of English have been declared as needed by the population for their study:

Business English: 60% of the population declare that business English is needed and helpful for their study.

General English: 10% of the population declare that general English is needed for their study

Business and General English: 30% of the population see that both business and general English together are needed for their study.

4.3 Work after finishing the study

20% of the population express their wish to immigrate and work in USA, UAE or QATAR.

30% wish to work in banking sector.

25% declare having the hope to work in one of the Algerian companies like SONATRACH

25% of the population declare that they have not yet decided about their work because they have no idea at the moment. We can justify this by the fact of being young and new student who have just joined the university.

4.4 Importance of English for work later

85% of the population reply that they will use English at their future work. They justify that the multinational environment obliges us to use English, English will be everywhere and that foreign countries accept only English speaking workers.

15% of the population say that they will not use English at their future work. They justify their reply by the fact of working in France and here in Algeria where according to them there will be no need to English.

CONCLUSION

The main findings of our study as far as needs analysis is concerned are:

❖ The necessities:

The necessities of this population that should be fulfilled by the teacher of English are:

Business English: 60% of the population declare that business English is needed and helpful for their study.

Specific Lessons : our population expressed the need and priority to learn these lessons that can be considered among the necessities:

- ✓ All what is related to business
- ✓ Grammar mainly tenses and the reported speech
- ✓ Pronunciation activities including speaking and listening
- ✓ Conversations

❖ The Lacks:

The lacks of this population according to our study are the different breakdowns they have with every skill.

With speaking: they have problems with pronunciation and they cannot express what they want in English.

With reading: they have also a problem of pronunciation and they sometimes pronounce some words in French.

With listening: they do not understand all what is said especially when the speaker of English speaks too fast. When there is noise in the class they do not also understand.

With writing: they make grammatical and spelling mistakes

❖ The wants:

The wants of our population are based mainly on the best ways of teaching the learners want to find in their teacher of English.

The teacher of English should be flexible and should apply different ways of teaching and adapt them with the different groups of students he has to teach. Every group of students has a preferred way of learning; a group may like the teacher to translate to Arabic and French. Another group may like the teacher to speak only in English and in a good accent that looks like native speakers.

In our study we tried to identify the good and bad practices of teachers of English and this according to the experience of students during their previous course at grammar school.

The current teacher of English should avoid these bad practices like **working only with excellent students** as stated by students.

He should rather maintain and develop the best practices like **giving more examples and exercises for explaining the lesson** and **treating the students like their father or mother because they are still young**.

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