

## NEED ANALYSIS IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS CURRICULUM AND ITS REPOSITIONING FOR JOB CREATION IN 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY

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### Abstract

Needs are defined against a background of normative concepts of almost infinite range and variety. The task is to select those normative areas in which there appear to be deficiencies and to match them up with what the educator can supply or provide. Where a deficiency can be remedied by the help of some educational process, an educational need is established. From this stand point, this paper takes a look into the theoretical basis of needs analysis. It further looks at the fundamental questions in needs analysis in curriculum planning as to what and why, When, who, how and for whom is there the need for needs analysis. It also highlights the importance of a new English language Arts curriculum and its prospects in job creation. It finally made suggestions, recommendations and concludes that there should be a broadening of the scope of needs analysis to encompass the full language learning process, such as determination of objectives, contents and curricula.

### Introduction

There have been several surveys or approaches to needs analysis in foreign language teaching and learning as in English and French. The term analysis of needs first appeared in India in the 1920s, when Michael West introduced the concept to cover two separate and potentially conflicting concepts of need contributing to the surrender value of learning: What

learners will be required to do with the language in the target situation, and how learners might best master the training. West was concerned with secondary level learner whose needs, though determinable in broad terms, could not be defined with any great precision and teaching is indeed, often defined in terms which exclude concept of need. The concept of need does

not seem to appear for almost fifty years after West, a point commented on by Schultz and Derwing (1980:300) Thus:- “It would seem that most language planners in the past have bypassed a logically necessary step, they have presumed to set about going somewhere without first determining whether or not their planned destination was reasonable or proper. However, the term returns to central prominence with the advent of English for special purposes (ESP), for which needs analysis has become a key instrument in course design”. The term, English for Special Purposes appeared first at the Makerere Conference in 1960, Commonwealth Education Liaison committee (1960) and this was soon linked to the concept of need. Indeed Halliday, McIntosh and Stevens (1964, 180) referred to English for special needs, although for them need was defined purely in linguistic terms as a special language or register.

It is however difficult to find a useable definition of needs in the context of second language learning. As Richterich (1983: 3) commented

*“The very concept of language needs has never been clearly defined and remains at best ambiguous. It is therefore useful to borrow some insights from the field of adult education, in which needs are conventionally defined as being something like “the gap between what is and what should be”.*

In other words, it comprises in the present study aspects of English Language which

students should have mastered before and after their studies in tertiary institutions.

### Theoretical Basis of Need Analysis

Needs analysis is by its very nature, a pragmatic activity based on highly localized situations (Tarone and Yule 1989). However, explicitly or implicitly, it has a basis on theory, a principle that was largely established by the Council of Europe (1981). The broad underlying theoretical basis they suggest, is that of curriculum development which according to Holec (1985 , 263 - ) has since the early 1960s followed three main tendencies: improving teaching methods, adapting the teaching to the type of learning public or school and training the learner on how to learn. Needs analysis has been rooted in the second of these tendencies and more recently the third.

More narrowly, any system of needs analysis is related to the theory of the nature of language from which the categories of language employed in the procedure is derived (Tarone and Yule, 1989:12 – 20). The selection of language categories constitutes the first step of the six – step model of course design proposed by Coffey (1984:7 -8).

1. Selection of theory  
     Nature of Language:  
     Principles of restriction e.g  
     communicative functions
2. Needs Analysis  
     A matching of vocational  
     needs with the categories  
     established.

3. Language Realization  
     ↓ The Transforming of the  
     functions skills previously  
     ↓ identified into language  
     terms
4. Course Design  
     ↓ The Ordering of the  
     language terms by other  
     ↓ relative importance and the  
     sequencing.
5. Course Construction  
     ↓ The devising of strategies  
     and techniques
6. Classroom Teaching

In Munby's case, the theoretical bases of needs analysis were contemporary views on the nature of communicative competence, derived principally from Hymes. It would be possible to build a model of needs analysis on the basis of linguistic competence as posited by Davies (1977 : 36) Robinson (1991: 11), taking both target needs and present levels of competence into account. Such a model, it is argued, in effect, would be a study of inter language and so, we may see error analysis, inter language studies and grammatically – based diagnostic testing. One of the old proponents of needs analysis is Cooper followed by Schultz and Derwing. Their study was followed by other types of analysis, notably register analysis. It is no accident that needs analysis emerged when communicative approaches of language and language learning were replacing grammar – based approaches as in Wilkin's 1978 study. He

noted that “the first step in the construction of any language syllabus or course is to define objectives wherever possible. This will be based on an analysis of the needs of the learners and these needs in turn, will be expressed in terms of the particular types of communication in which the learner will need to engage.

Despite its base in concepts of communicative competence, Munby's method is essentially performance related, with his categories of communicative activity and communicative event which are categories of real – world language use than elements of a construct of communicative competence.

### **Fundamental Questions in Needs Analysis**

In any needs analysis procedure, we find ourselves faced with a number of unavoidable questions to which one must, in one way or the other find answers to. The questions with their possible answers are a prerequisite to all identification methodology. These fundamental questions and possible answers are surveyed in this section.

### **What and Why?**

There has remained a great reluctance to agree on a definition of needs. The very concept of language needs has never been clearly defined as the distinction or even contradiction between various concepts of need necessities or demands (also called objective, product-oriented or perceived needs, learners' wants, subjective or felt needs.) and the methods of bridging the gap between these

two process-oriented needs. The term 'needs' is often now seen as an umbrella term covering several interpretations.

**(a) Necessities**

These are the types of needs determined by the demands of the target situation, that is, what the learner has to know in order to function effectively in the target situation; Hutchinson, Waters (1987) described these as objective needs which can more or less, be assumed to be general from an analysis approach. Identifying these necessities is frequently apparent however, that many language courses are not terminus courses and that interim objective short of the necessities of the target situation will have to be set.

In such cases, it would be better to regard the course objectives as short of medium-term goals or aims of this type may be determined by the end-of- course test or examination Tarone and Yule, (1989: 4) so that it become important to determine the test requirements in such a way that they represent practical and useful learning goals, providing beneficial wash-back and wash-forward effects at the end the scale, language audits may establish target needs in terms of key assets, i.e. the need for foreign language as a 'key' to new possibilities and opportunities.

Needs could be seen in situational or functional terms (listening to lecturers, speaking on the phone, writing business letters etc). Some procedures then go even further to specify what grammatical or lexical language components are necessary in order to realize a particular function.

**(b) Lacks:** To identify necessities alone is not enough. 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 proficiencies in other words, need to be matched against the existing proficiency of the learners. The gap between the two can be referred to as learners' lacks (Hutchinson and Waters 1987: 55 – 56). It is then, lacks which determine the syllabus rhetorical structures that are not included in the syllabus simply because they exist, but only if they are either or if knowing how to handle the particular rhetorical structure can help in the reading process (Alderson, 1980: 136.) In this survey, any needs analysis procedure adopting this approach will be called Deficiency Analysis.

**c. Wants:** Hutchinson and Waters third class of needs is wants, i.e. what the learners want and feel they need. These needs are personal and therefore, are sometimes referred to as subjective needs which cannot be said to be general. They are quite unforeseeable and therefore indefinable. It is often pointed out that these may differ, even conflict, with necessities as perceived by a sponsor or employer and lacks are identified by the teacher.

**d. Learning Strategies:** Hutchinson and Waters (1987:60-2) identified two types of learning needs which may usefully be separated. The first being the learners preferred learning strategies for progressing from where they are (present

situation, lacks deficiencies) to where they want to go (target situation/necessities). Once again, these needs may be a source of conflict because the teacher's interpretation of suitable strategies may differ from learners' expectations or preconceptions about the form a language learning experience should take (Tarone and Yule, 1989:9)

**e. Constraints:** The second element included by Hutchinson and Waters when considering the decision-making process in a needs analysis is the potential and constraints of the learning situation. These are the external factors which may include the resources (staff, accommodation, time) available, the prevailing attitudes or culture and the materials and methods available. These were all areas deliberately ignored in early approaches to need analysis eg Mundy's (1978) study. But they are now seen as central to the process of course design and have come to be known as Means Analysis (Halliday 1984 & Cooke 1982) for if the resources are fixed, then the objectives themselves must be negotiable.

**f. The Language Audit:** This is the sixth type of needs analysis conducted by Pilbeam in 1979. There were other personalities who carried out this type of needs analysis in 1993. The study is a large-scale survey undertaken by a company, an organization or even a country to determine what language ought to be learnt, for what reasons, by how many people, to what level, at what cost and so on. These are big and often political

questions that were originally deemed outside the scope of needs analysis but which now give it a much broader remit, making it a matter of language planning. In essence, a language audit differs from a needs analysis in scale. Needs analysis is used to determine the various needs of an individual or group. A language audit defines the longer-term language training requirements of a company, country or professional sector and can thus, be seen as a strategy or policy documents.

The language audit may include all the levels or layers of a needs analysis that is, it covers the types of needs analysis from (a-e above), so that, say, the strategy analysis component would seek to identify delivery mode which are appropriate for the majority of learners or trainees and which would then become company practice or ministry policy.

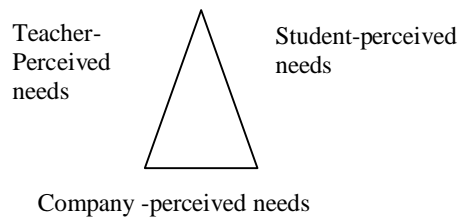
Each of these pertinent questions to the needs analysis is further examined below:

**When:** At what point in the course, should needs analysis be carried out? There seem to be three questions. They are:

(i) Before (ii) at the start (iii) during the training course and the 4<sup>th</sup> is at the end of course. It has standard practice to conduct as much of the needs analysis as possible before the start of the course, but it is now generally accepted that the procedure should be repeated during the course, so that needs analysis becomes an on-going process. This is a reflection of the now-common acceptance that a concern with process is a good thing in all areas of language teaching.

The first answer has been called off-line analysis and involves analysis in advance of the course so that the course designer has ample time to prepare a Syllabus and select or develop appropriate materials. Typically, the second answer is on-line or first-day needs analysis, which takes place when trainees arrive to start their course. The advantages and disadvantages are the converse of the off –line approach. The third approach is a response needs or at least that their perceptions of their needs will change as the course proceeds.

**Who:** The question to be answered here is who should decide what the language needs are? There are three principal parties involved in what is to be called the needs analysis triangle (Hoadly & Maidment, 1980).



### **Hoadly & Maidment 1980 Needs Analysis Triangle**

Ideally, these three – teacher, student and sponsor interact in a comparative way. Hoadly-Maidment (1980) stated that any body can identify language needs and he clarified this statement by listing nine combinations of the three principal parties working in co-operation. There are also various informants or sources for needs analysis, notably are former situation and specialist/native speaker informants.

Others stressed the importance of having the maximum number of sources of information if the identification of needs is to be reliable

**For whom:** The usual assumption is that the needs analysis is carried out for the benefit of the users, i.e. the student or trainee. However, language audits are more likely to be carried out from the view point of the requisite-institutions or even countries needing the services of trained personnel with identifiable foreign language.

**How:** Needs analysis is carried out through a series of steps or phases Schulz & Darwing (1981:35) listed eight such phases – but perhaps the crucial one is selecting the information gathering instrument. There are many ways to carry out a needs analysis ranging from major scientific surveys to informal tools put together by an individual teacher for and with his or her class.

**How Long:** The length of time taken to carry out a needs analysis will obviously vary from the scale and method. However, Gadner & Winslow (1983:76) reported that the reason most often given for not setting up and implementing needs analysis procedures was pressure on staff time. In part, this problem stems from a lack of awareness on the part of institutions and employers of the value or even existence of needs identification.

A brief attempt will be made here to look into the other procedures of needs analysis.

**Target-Situation Analysis:** The common form of needs analysis is devoted to establishing the learners' language requirements in the occupational or academic situation they are being prepared for target situation analysis. The earliest TSA procedures were designed to determine how much English was used, usually using a questionnaire. Surveys of this kind provided a strong justification for Test of English for Special Purposes (TESP) courses but they did not give a clear picture of what the language was used for. The most widely used procedure for providing detailed data about the precise uses of the target language by different groups of personnel was devised by the English Language Teaching Development Unit (ELTDU) (1970) and subsequently adopted by others. This procedure subdivides the four traditional language skills and so arrives at a classification of 20 activities to cover all business and commercial situations.

**Deficiency Analysis:** The approaches to needs analysis that have been developed to take account of learners' present needs or wants as well as the requirements of the target situation may be called analysis of Learners' deficiencies or lacks. Robinson (1991:9) referred to this process as combined target situation analysis and present situation analysis. Here, we start from the target situation and design the curriculum around the gap between the present abilities of the target trainees and the needs of the situation in which they will find themselves at the end of the training programme. Most systems taking

this approach include two central components namely (a) an inventory of potential target needs expressed in terms of activities and (b), a scale that is used to establish (and subsequently re-establish) the priority that should be given to each activity.

### **English Language Arts Curriculum and the Prospects of Job Creation.**

English is said to be the mother of all subjects. In other words, it is the pivot on which the teaching and learning of all subjects revolve. With the adoption of a new elaborated curriculum, Nigerians would be able to effectively use the language in every facet of their every day life. The only language of communication in most of our homes and offices is English and so, there is the need that effective communication in the language is very useful. With the adoption of a language curriculum that will make the learners of the language to know where they are beginning and where they are ending i.e the target situation, it is believed that they will know that the study of English language is not an end in itself but a means to an end.

If Nigeria must take its place in comity of nations, then it is very paramount that it is time we started to carry out a need analysis on the use of the language in linguistic, semantic, syntactical and grammatical contexts so as to meet the needs and the requirements on the teaching and learning of English as it is expressively used in the world today.

### Conclusion

In recent time, there has been broadening of the scope of needs analysis to encompass the full educational process especially in language learning. These scope of needs analysis in language learning include the determination of objectives, contents and curricula for the production and testing of new materials for the development of autonomous learning, assessment by the learner, feed back for conduct and reorientation of the project, teacher education and re-education and finally, for running an entire educational system forms the broad spectrum of needs analysis as an educational endeavour.

### Suggestions/Recommendation

Arising from the various survey of needs analysis, it is suggested and recommended that the following methods could be adopted for Needs Analysis.

1. **Pre-course Diagnostics tests:** This is meant to estimate the approximate language level of the student.
2. **Entry test on arrival:** These tests potentially have greater diagnostic properties and are therefore more precise in identifying learner's weaknesses and lacks.
3. **Observation of classes:** It is suggested that classroom observation as an approach requires little explanation if a check-list or set of notice is at hand.
4. **Surveys based on questionnaires:** In an earlier study, Jordan and Mackay (1992) used a questionnaire to survey 106 students in two British Universities to assess their learning

priorities and the questionnaire is now established as the most common method of need analysis.

5. **Structured Interview:** Jones (1991) in an earlier study referred to the intrinsic superiority of the interview as an information gathering technique for need analysis.
6. **Learners' Diaries:** In O'Brien's study-in 1989, he analyzed 15 English for Academic Purposes (EAP) Students' diaries and found that they focused on four areas, course output, tutor performance, learner performance and external factors affecting study (home-related anxiety, food and accommodation and personal variables). It is therefore suggested that these four areas should be focused on when carrying out a need analysis survey:
7. **Final evaluation/feedback:** At the end of the course, a test or evaluation provides information for the student on the effectiveness of learning which can be used as a basis for future self-improvement.
8. **Previous Research:** Considerable research has been concluded on the needs and deficiencies of certain categories of learners. It is therefore necessary to use previous research materials to establish the learning needs of students.

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