

# Selection of needs analysis approaches



ESP (English for Specific Purposes) is defined as an approach to language teaching in which all decisions as to content and method are based on the learners' reason for learning (Hutchinson and Waters, 1986). In other words, ESP courses are designed with the intention of meeting learners' needs. Moreover, they also indicate that ESP is just one branch of EFL/ESL, the tree of which is nourished from communication and learning. Thus, like other forms of language teaching, ESP courses are designed in order to meet the certain purposes which learners are required to learn English for. They can be academic purposes (EAP) or work/training purposes (EOP/EVP/VESL). In another classification, the purposes of ESP courses can be for Science and Technology, Business and Economics or Social Sciences. As those above-mentioned purposes are quite various, it raises the necessity of Needs Analysis, which is considered as “ the irreducible minimum of an ESP approach to course design” (Hutchinson and Waters, 1986, p54) or a vital step in the process of designing and carrying out any ESP courses (Songhori, 2008) or the very first step of course design process which provides validity and relevancy for all subsequent course design activities (Johns, 1991). With such increasingly importance of Needs Analysis to ESP course designers, this paper is conducted as a practice of carrying out Needs Analysis. However, due to the timing constraint as well as the requirement of the course, the paper just focuses on choosing an appropriate Needs Analysis approach to collecting the information of a specific group of learners' needs. The paper also provides a detailed rationale and some samples of the means of data collection in order to support for the selection.

## **NEEDS ANALYSIS THEORIES**

Since Needs Analysis is performed in order to find out not only the “necessity”, the “lacks” and the “wants” of learners towards the target situations (target needs) but also the learning needs or what learners need to do in order to learn, there exists different approaches to Needs Analysis, namely Target Situation Analysis, Present Situation Analysis, Pedagogic Needs Analysis, Deficiency Analysis, Strategy Analysis or Learning Needs Analysis, Means Analysis, Register Analysis, Discourse Analysis, and Genre Analysis.

The term “Target Situation Analysis” (TSA) was first introduced as “communication in the target situation” in Chambers’ article (1980). However, in his book published in 1978, Munby already mentioned the target situation which, according to him, was closely concerned with the target needs and target level of performance and this has been followed by many researchers (Hutchinson and Waters, 1986; Dudley-Evans and St. John, 1998; West, 1994) with inheritance and development. Yet, whatever similarities or differences they share, they all use TSA with the same aim of finding as thoroughly as possible the linguistic form a prospective ESP learner is likely to use in various situations in his target environment. For example, Hutchinson and Waters (1986) considered Target Needs Analysis as “in essence a matter of asking questions about the target situation and the attitudes towards that situation of various participants of the learning process” (p59) and most of those questions are closely related to Munby’s parameters.

The second type of Needs Analysis that needs mentioning is PSA or Present Situation Analysis which may be posited as a complementary to target situation analysis (Robinson, 1991). As presented from its term, PSA is used with the attempt to find out the information about learners at the beginning of the course. It may estimate the strength and weaknesses of learners in all aspects, including language, skills as well as learning experiences. It may also involve information about the teaching and learning settings or the user-institution's reference. The information for PSA can come from a well established test or from learners' previous learning results.

Deficiency analysis or lack analysis is claimed to form the basis of the language syllabus (Jordon, 1997) since it is supposed to provide information about both the present situation and target situation and thus, the gap between them for the course designer to consult.

Strategy analysis or learning needs analysis is another important type that the course designer should take into considerations when he/she designing an ESP course. It is concerned with learners' view of learning or their learning preferences. It tries to establish how they wish to learn rather than what they need to learn and consequently help course designer to find ways of motivating and enabling learners to reach the goals of the course.

Means analysis is considered to provide the course designer with “ information about the environment in which the course will be run” (Dudley-Evans and St. John, 1998, p125) and consequently, the approach attempts to adapt the ESP course to the setting of the learning institution.

The last type mentioned in this paper is Pedagogic Needs Analysis proposed by West (1998). It is considered to be a combination of all above-mentioned approaches with the hope to compensate all shortcomings of the above approaches through the combination. However, in some cases, it does not always work.

In the history of ESP development, there may exist some other Needs Analysis approaches. However, due to the limit of this paper, only nine above approaches are selected to be briefly described.

## **BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF TARGET LEARNERS**

As aforesaid, this paper only focuses on finding a suitable Needs Analysis approach for a specific group of learners. More specifically, they are twenty 2nd-year students of Electronics and Telecommunications Department, College of Technology. They have just finished two terms of General English. According to their learning results of the first two terms, they are pre-intermediate English learners. This ESP course is their 3rd and also the last term of learning English at university and it is supposed to be a preparation for them to be ready for their future career of telecommunication engineers.

The course is planned to last four months which will be divided into fifteen weeks of learning. In each week, learners are intended to attend seven 45-minute periods which will be allocated in two different mornings.

The institution (i. e. College of Technology) assures to provide all needed facilities for the process of learning and teaching. For instance, essential teaching aids like tape/CD players, computers, projectors and a well-equipped library are always available for use. Teachers are also promised to

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have best conditions of finding appropriate materials as well as creating teaching environments to assist to process of learning and teaching.

Above is all provided information about the target group of the English course for Telecommunication which is taught in the third term of the university curriculum.

## **APPROACH SELECTION WITH A DETAILED RATIONALE**

In order to support the process of designing the most appropriate and effective course for the above-mentioned target group, it is necessary to give an adequate profile of the above-mentioned learners' needs by means of a combination of two approaches: (1) target needs analysis and (2) learning needs analysis. The reasons for such selection are discussed as followed:

Firstly, as aforesaid, an ESP course is designed to meet some certain needs of learners by bridging the gap between a current state and a desired or target one (Graves, 2000). Thus, it is necessary for the course designer to be aware of the learners' states at both point of time. In other words, he/she is suggested to carry out both TSA and PSA. However, in this situation, since the target group of this ESP course is in their 3rd term at university, the course designer is quite sure about the current state of the learners as well as the current state of the institution facility. He/She knows where the learners are and what the learners lack. He/She also know what kinds of facilities are available to support the process of learning and teaching. Consequently, there is no need of carrying out a PSA for learners' existing

state of language/skills or the conditions of learning but there must be a necessity of TSA which is supposed to gather adequate and specific information about how the language will be used, what the content areas will be, who the learners will use the language with, where and when the language will be used, etc. (Hutchinson and Waters, 1986) or about purposive domain, setting, interaction, instrumentality, dialect, communicative event, communicative key and target level (Munby, 1978). In conclusion, TSA is hoped to be a reliable indicator which can determine the destination of the course. It can also act as a compass to give the direction for the journey of teaching and learning.

Nevertheless, TSA only provides the course designer with the information of the target situation. In other words, TSA can just answer the question of what to teach and how to teach. In this case, that is not enough. As this term is a part of a learning process, it is also crucial for the course designer to take into considerations the learners' learning preferences. Thus, the employment of another needs analysis (i. e. learning needs analysis/LSA) is a good choice to make the process of course design perfect. Moreover, it is believed that the learning preferences and strategies for GE (general English) may be different from those for ESP. As a result, the course designer needs to know these differences in order to design an appropriate course for most of the learners.

All in all, a combination of TSA and LSA is considered inevitable and is expected to offer the ESP course designer a full profile of both target situation and learning preferences for the 3rd-year students of Electronics and Telecommunications Department, College of Technology.

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## **SAMPLES OF THE MEANS FOR DATA COLLECTION**

As decided in the previous part, a combination of TSA and LSA is employed to give a detailed profile of target situation and learning preferences in order to support the design of the English course for Telecommunication. More specifically, both formal and informal means will be used to collect the data for the needs analysis at the beginning and during the course.

At the beginning of the course, formal interviews with the managers of some telecommunication foreign companies will be carried out to identify the target situations in which learners will have to use the language. Below is some sample questions that may be included in the interview:

Who will your employees speak English to? Native or non-native speakers?

What is their level of main interlocutors' knowledge? Expert or layman?

Where will your employees have to use English? In the office, at the workshop or in the meetings? Can you mention some other situations?

Firstly, an informal questionnaire with both closed and open-ended questions will be delivered to learners to find out the preferences of learners' learning.

Below is one sample question that may be included in the questionnaire:

What kinds of materials do you want to work with in the course? (Please tick on the box the materials you want to work with)

Textbooks provided by teachers

Authentic materials (manuals, articles about telecommunication in newspaper, magazines, etc.) provided by teachers

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Authentic materials (manuals, articles about telecommunication in newspaper, magazines, etc.) searched and selected by learners

A mixed use of all kinds

Informal interviews with ex-learners (i. e. learners who already took the English course of Telecommunication) will be also utilized to specify the information of what they think should be included in the course as well as the way they think the best way to learn the target language. Below is a potential question that may be included in the interview

In your point of view, which is the most important language skill that learners of this ESP course should improve? Reading? Speaking? Writing? Or listening? Why do you think so?

During the course, another informal questionnaire will be delivered to learners of the course in order to check whether the course goes right or not.