

# Summary and needs analysis of esp



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ESP is meant to prepare learners to employ English for educational or occupational goals, and it develops to become a major key in English language teaching (Brumfit, 1988: 10). It should be considered as ‘ an approach not as a product’ in language learning in the way it focuses on the learners needs (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987: 19). It is ‘ a materials- and teaching- led movement’ (Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998: 19). In fact, it is a learner-centred approach because its aim is to specify the needs of a particular group of learners.

One important feature in ESP is course design which is basically based on need analysis. A considerable amount of literature has been published on needs analysis (henceforth NA). For example, (Munby, 1978; Hutchinson and Waters, 1987; Berwick, 1989; Brindley, 1989; West, 1994; Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998). Several studies conducted on NA have used various methods and procedures for data-gathering (e. g., Long, 2005; Lett, 2005; Jasso-Aguilar, 2005; Gilabert, 2005; Cowling, 2007) and they reflect more valuable feedback on the importance of NA. Although these studies have revealed the positive advantages of NA in ESP, NA has been come under fierce criticisms (Basturkmen, 2006: 19/20).

This paper attempts to summarize three main criticisms over NA as provided in Basturkmen’s book. Then, these criticisms will be discussed separately. Finally, some related issues to needs analysis in the author’s context will be highlighted.

## **1. The first criticism:**

Basturkmen reports ‘ The information too often comes from the institutions themselves, who already have define expectations about what the students should be able to do, and thus needs analysis serve the interests of the institutions, of at the expense of the learners (Aurebach, 1995)’.

### **1. 1 Summary of Aurebach’s article:**

In her article, ‘ The politics of the ESL classroom: Issues of power in pedagogical choices’, Aurebach discusses in detail her plausible argument against the embedded influence of institution power (outsider) upon the content adults EFL selection and the process of ESL pedagogy.

In the theoretical framework section, she looks into detail at the most influential views of some scholars on the covert authority approach to language teaching. Fairclough (1989) calls it ‘ ideological power’ and argues that this approach makes its way through education by forcing or convincing. Freire(1970) names it ‘ banking model’, and he asserts that this approach affects learners in the way it assimilates them into power perception, and influence knowledge in the way it is seen as neutral and political objective.

When it comes to curriculum development section, she draws our attention to issues relating content selection, classrooms, learners and teachers’ role from the end-means prospective. In ends-means approach, although the curriculum is based on successful researching process of knowledge, it has been developed to function the institutional goals. As a result of this, content is designed to reflect these goals, and the syllabus comes to be seen as ‘ prescription’ for institutional demands and any breakthrough is not

legitimate. It would be appeared, then, that learners are not be able to participate in the process of curriculum development. They are unable to articulate their needs; hence they become passive learners who are prepared to develop skills in order to satisfy employment needs. The teachers' role is very limited and it becomes to be seen as a deliverer of what has been created by institutional dominant. When discussing Freire's approach, Aurebach acknowledges that North America literacy was enlightened by his work. In the light of this approach, the content is shaped through critical discussion between the teachers and the learners. Learners determine for themselves what is important and teachers become leading researchers.

Her fierce opposition to the influence of power on content is seen when she discusses the ideological issues embedded in the content. This content is a very state- prescribed in the way it aims at shaping submissive workers who would obey the regulations of American life, and rarely complain or defend their rights. She argues that the institutional content is based on covert political aims. Although it is supposed to smooth the adjustment process for the refugees, it used as a vehicle for designing workers who can master skills for employment prospect.

She argues that materials selection has been established in alignment with the authority. Yet, she asserts that learners should participate in materials selection and evaluation process. In this respect, materials should be related to the learners' lives and invite them to add their ideas and experience. She condemns the institutional content in the way its texts include less space for learners' real life and its exercises focus on drill forms rather than on sharing

opinions. She calls for student- driven curriculum and he refutes the old assumption about their incapability to play the leading role in this process.

In the last sections, she goes to examine in more details the issue of including or excluding the use of L1 in adult ESL classrooms. Then she lists some studies which their findings may lead to the superiority of one approach (Bilingual) above the other (English-only). She supports the former for its effectiveness outcomes but stands against the latter because it may lead to higher frustration on the part of the students. She concludes her article with a strong request for building a participatory approach and applying critical approving between the teachers and the learners in curriculum development.

## **1. 2: Discussing the first criticism:**

Aurebach's view can be in some way valid, but I think it falls short when she provokes bitter dispute over institution intervention. Long (2005), who advocates the use multiple sources and methods, agrees that institutional predetermination of curriculum may lead to serious problems. However, he maintains that this intervention can be limited (as cited in Jasso-Aguilar, 2005: 128). For example, in the case when institutions specify their goals, there is still space for needs analyst to include other resources in order to gain reliable information. Cowling's (2005) study on NA is an excellent example. By using multiple sources and methods, he successfully manages to design an effective course which goes in agreement with the institutions' goals and taking into consideration the insiders' needs. Long (2005: 26) refutes Aurebach's view about considering learners the only best informants in NA because they may not provide the best reliable data, and there are

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successful studies which include insiders (expertise) as informants (e. g., Long, 2005; Lett, 2005; Jasso-Aguilar, 2005; Gilabert, 2005) and they reflect more valuable information than the outsiders can do.

Furthermore, institutions' demands can sometimes work for the benefit of the learners. In Lehtonen & Karjalainen's (2008) study, the employers (outsiders) highlight the language needs of university students. Under the type of NA process taken in this study, learners cannot be considered the only source for curriculum development because they may often provide unreliable information (Long, 2005: 26).

Most importantly to note that institutions may have an influence on NA process. Yet, needs analysts can reach an acceptable compromise between institutions' demands and insiders' needs by finding many possible ways to interpret these views to be in agreement with all the parties (Berwick, 1989: 62).

## **2. The second criticism**

Basturkmen states that Jasso-Aguilar notes that ' perspectives of needs vary and the needs analyst has to decide whose perspective to take into account in designing ESP course or synthesize divergent perspectives (Jasso-Aguilar, 1999)'.

### **2. 1: Summary of Jasso-Aguilar's article:**

Her study was carried out in one of the most well-known hotels in Waikiki. The aim of the study is to identify the language needs of the housekeepers and to find out if they perceive this as need, and to identify the needs perceived by both the housekeepers and the institution and followed by

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interpretation if there is any dissimilar views. She used multiple sources (housekeepers, supervisors, and staff members) and different methods range from active participation, observation, unstructured interviews to questionnaire for both the housekeepers and for the co-workers. After triangulating these sources and methods, she obtained conflicting findings which have clarified some large contradict views.

In her state-of-the-art article, Jasso-Aguilar reviews the literature of NA for Vocational English as a Second Language VESL and highlights the approaches to NA. Firstly, she shows that NA process has gone through many stages and has faced constraints and criticisms. Then, in the second section of her article ‘Orientations in NA for the workplace: sources and methods, she traces the development of methods and sources used in NA. (e. g., use of various methods West, 1984; use goal analysis Prince 1984; use of task-based analysis Long, 1985; triangulation, Long, 2005). All these studies agree that learners’ needs vary among the learners themselves, and prove that there is difference between learners’ needs and what institutions perceive as need. They also reveal the effectiveness of using multiple sources and triangulation for gaining more accurate and valid information and the reliability of the domain experts.

In her study, the task force was based on collecting data from a wide range of hotel staff about hypothetical situations housekeepers are likely to face and language they may use or hear. Then NA was processed in a one-hour session discussing these prospects. Being joined as a trainee housekeeper contributes to a more comprehensible picture of how training is done and, at

the same time, to a more clear vision of which language or situations the housekeepers may encounter on daily basis.

By using triangulation of sources and methods, considerable discrepancies are identified. The institutional representatives perceive that housekeepers should develop their English communication. Yet, Jasso-Aguilar finds that lack of English proficiency did not affect their job performance. On their daily-shift, the housekeepers followed the same safety steps and rarely used English. She finds out that outsiders' predication about the situations which the housekeepers may involve in were not valid. Although the only correct prediction (guests have no keys and asking for entering their rooms) happened twice, it did not reflect truly the type of conversation engaged between the guests and the housekeepers.

She reveals the importance of using the suitable method and considers its compatibility with informants. Unstructured interviews provide more accurate and abundant information, while questionnaires did not because of the low English level.

She concludes her article with positive recommendations of the advantages of using multiple sources and various methods to determine the learners' needs and for identifying any contradict perceptions between the outsiders and the insiders. She also highlights the importance of considering the social context of the informants at the workplace.

### **2. 3: Discussing the second criticism:**

I personally believe that Jasso-Aguilar's study, among other studies (e. g., Long, 2005; Gilabert, 2005; Cowling, 2008) is the most valuable one. ' Jasso-  
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Aguilar's (1999, this volume) study of the language and tasks performed by maids in a Waikiki hotel was an exception' (Long, 2005: 30) because she does not content to report the contradict views but she successfully explains the reasons behind the divergent perceptions.

The findings of these studies have proved the existence of clashing perceptions and different views from different resources in the same setting. For example, in Cumaranutung's(1988) study of Sirlankan domestic workers in West Asia, he reports that maids, agents, and employers make different responses to the importance of learning English in the very similar situations. The maids confirm their needs for learning English for the sake of asking about directions. Whilst for the same situation as asking about directions, agents and employers hold different responses. As to identify problems from these resources, there are also discrepancies. Although, they all identify salary as a major problem, the employers and the agents identify pregnancy as a problem but this problem is not identified by domestic workers.

Therefore, when it comes to course design, Cumaranutung points out that a course designer should be selective about what can be culturally acceptable in the target situation. Boshar & Smalkoski's (2002) study, they include the issue of cultural differences in the health-care course in order to bring much diverse together between the health-care provider and the client.

It is apparent that different perceptions from different informants may influence course design process in the way they may lead to create complexity to decide which of these different needs are possible to include in course syllabus Chambers (1980: 30). As suggested by Berwick (1989: 53)

that the main constraints in needs-based syllabus ‘ lies in the specification of who needs what’.

Therefore, a need analyst should identify some sort of priority between these dissimilar needs in order to narrow the complexity in identifying which of these needs are possible to include (Champers, 1980: 26). Champers suggests that needs-based syllabus is determined by target analysis situation (henceforth TAS) but this does not mean, of course, neglecting information obtained from other resources (ibid: 26). Yet, Berwick (1989: 57) states that ‘ reliance on candidates who face instruction to describe their needs (as opposed to merely offering evidence of them during observation) is not going to prove very fruitful’. Hutchinson & Waters (1987) assert that TAS has an effective role in ESP course design but factors relating to learning needs should be taken into account ‘ Analysis of the target situation can tell us what people do with language. What we also need to know is how people learn to do what they do with language’.

Moreover, it would be useful not to include all the information a need analyst gathers in course design , but he should take some other external factors such as classroom facilities, time, cultural differences and cost. As reported by Hutchinson & Waters (1987: 65) ‘ there is no necessary one-to-one transfer from needs analysis to course design...’

Using multiple sources and methods may positively assist the needs analysts to hold accurate and valid information. Also using triangulation of sources and methods is also very useful because it enhances the credibility of the obtained data. Also, domain experts can provide needs analysts with the

most reliable information in establishing a basis for course design (Long, 2005; Jasso- Aguilar, 2005; Gilabert, 2005; Cowling, 2007).

Furthermore, the use of carefully sequenced methods is useful for obtaining accurate information (Long, 2005: 64). Another useful method for providing valid information is task-based analysis, task as a unit of need analysis. Long (2005) conducts a task-based analysis in his of flight attendants study and Lett (2005) uses it in his study of US military students. It is believed that this method provides more accurate information by using present language knowledge of domain experts to identify target needs as based on Lett's (2005, as cited in Long, 2005: 28) view, ' combining domain experts and language proficiency experts in a team can produce successful task-based language NAs'.

### **3. The third criticism:**

Basturkmen reports that ' Language needs are not learning needs. Although learners will need to use certain language structures or features in their target environments, this does not mean that they are ready to acquire them' (Hutchinson&Waters, 1987).

#### **3. 1. A summary of Hutchinson &Waters, 1987:**

In the sixth chapter of their book, Hutchinson &Waters include useful description of needs analysis and highlight its important role in course design. They also and explore the importance of learning needs. They maintain that ESP main aim is to teach English as a subject related to the learners' needs and believe that what makes ESP different from General

English ‘ is not the existence of a need as such but rather an awareness of the need.’

Next, the authors discuss in detail the development of NA process. A preliminary stage in NA is the publication of Munby’s (1978) ‘ Communicative Syllabus Design’. He introduces ‘ communication needs process ‘ in which he provides a set of questions to identify the target situation objectives.

The authors come to a vital point when they draw an important distinction between target needs and learning needs. They define target needs in terms of necessities, lacks, and wants. Necessity refers to what perceived by an institution or a teacher, lacks means to identify the gap between what is already have been determined as need and what the learner knows, and wants refers to understand what the learner feels as need. They outline methods for gathering information and present kind of information needed for target situation analysis.

Under learning needs section, the authors argue that there is too little is given to learning needs, and suggest that learners’ learning needs should be taken into consideration before applying course design process because they may use to determine the appropriate type of skills, methodologies and language items in the content. By focusing on satisfying their learning needs, the learners will become motivated in their studying. Finally, they conclude this chapter with gently reminding of the importance of learning-centred approach to NA and to course design.

### **3. 2: Discussing the third criticism:**

Identifying learning needs such as educational abilities, areas of difficulties and interest are useful in establishing the appropriate type of content and in achieving desirable outcomes (Mackay & Mountford, 1978; Brindley, 1989).

In their study, Boshier and Smalkoski (2002) collect information from EFL health-care students about what they perceive as the greatest level of difficulties. Based on such information, they aim at developing a course which can enable the learners to overcome their learning difficulties, 'our course has been successful because it responds to the objective, subjective and learning needs of EFL students in the A. S degree nursing program at the College of St. Catherine Minneapolis campus' (Boshier and Smalkoski, 2002: 75).

Information about learning needs can determine the type of activities or teaching methodology that learners want to have. Therefore, considering such information may increase their motivation to take the course and enhance their progress. On the other hand, if the course does not organise to engage the learners' interest or 'based on unsuitable or irreverent samples of language and units of description will have low motivational value for the students' (Mackay & Mountford, 1978: 10).

As more the course satisfies learners' learning needs as more they become confident and involved. Responding to learning needs in course design is valuable because it shows learners the right rout to utilize their present knowledge effectively enabling them to perform well in the target situation.

#### **4. Issues related to NA in the English Language Centre:**

According to the author's experience of teaching ESP courses in one of the main universities in Saudi Arabia, I have found that the English Language Centre there does not apply the real concept of teaching English for Specific purposes. The head of English Language Centre demonstrates full authority over what to teach, how many units should cover and how to assess the learners. They are seen as in Freire's words 'banking models' and learners are seen as 'empty vessels' (Aurebach, 1995).

Moreover, ESP courses are not based on NA because the courses are chosen on behalf of the students and the teachers. In other words, these ESP courses have not been chosen to meet learners' real needs. They are not intended to stimulate them or to work on their needs to be able to utilize what they have learnt effectively in the in (target situation) the real world. The same courses are taught for different disciplines and for different levels. Within this framework, teacher's role is very limited. There is no space for the teacher to engage learners' interest or even to make decision about the proper type of content. She has ready-made rules to follow and her aim is to satisfy the centre by covering as many units as she can before the term ends.

Accordingly, it would be helpful to see some changes in the English Language Centre. A small change may contribute to broader differences. These changes should be applied gradually with outstanding collaboration from other parties in the university.