

Research Article

THE IMPORTANT ROLE OF ENGLISH FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES (ESP) IN LANGUAGE LEARNING AND TEACHING FOR EMPLOYERS IN HANOI, VIETNAM

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ABSTRACT

Nowadays, English has taken a very important role in almost every aspect of human lives throughout the world, especially in the non-native countries. It has turned into a very vital tool in communicating. Not only because it is widely acknowledged as an international language, but also it has become an inevitable need that takes part even in the smallest part of our lives; in a large scope, it is a tool of communication between countries, cultural groups, various companies and organizations and communities, at school, English is a compulsory subject to be taught (since elementary level), while at works, the workers are required to be proficient in English, every line of household and electronic equipment's instructions is given in English, even an instruction of how to cook an instant noodle is written in English. It is clear that it has been one of the effects of the globalization era that allows people from different countries to get into and out of any other countries; they want, for business, profession as guide or restaurant Leader, educational, leisure or any other purposes. This situation without doubt affects both the visitors and the local people in many cases; one of them is in interacting..

Keywords: ESP; important; target group.

INTRODUCTION

It is indispensable to find the best way to learn English effective for particular purposes. That is the reason why English for specific purpose (ESP) has appeared and developed. ESP has played a very important role in language teaching in the world. Hutchinson & Waters (1987) see ESP as an "approach" rather than a "product", by which they mean that the foundation of ESP is the simple question: "why does this learner need to learn a foreign language?" In accordance to that, dealing with ESP issues, the use of English has been specified based on the workplace and the user. Since, there is a tendency that in a certain workplace, the workers will meet certain people with certain needs, and tend to do or talk about certain things which is mostly repeated and oriented just about the same thing every day. For instance, a hotel staff has one main duty to tell the same stories repeatedly to different people. So, basically it'll be easy to learn it since we only need to practice the same systematic form repetitively. Therefore, once the scope is specified, people who want to learn English within ESP context are able to reach their learning target based on their specific needs in a relatively short time. In this study, I am going to give a description of the ESP target group. Secondly, an overview of needs, its roles in ESP syllabus design and different approaches to Needs Analysis will be briefly presented. Thirdly, a rationale for the approaches and a sample of the means for data collection will be included, just before the conclusion of the study.

A DESCRIPTION OF THE TARGET GROUP

A group of 20 restaurant employees, working for New Century Restaurant in Hanoi city, aged from 22 to 40. Eleven men including middle management, information technology engineers, officials and nine women including accountant, telephonists, secretaries and officials. Both men and women graduated from different college or universities but they cannot use English at work as fluently as they need.

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Timetable for English class: Two hours three times a week.

Place: Classroom at New Century Restaurant

Needs

- Most of them need to review basic English.
- English for speaking and writing to communicate at work (e.g: e.g: for transactions with foreigners; for telephoning in English...).
- All twenty learners have to deal with English-speaking customers and have to translate freely between English and Vietnamese.

Problems

- Not all of the twenty want to be in English classes as they have had to give up other activities in order to attend such as: playing sport, going out with their family, taking care of children...
- The class is held at New Century Restaurant where may make concentration more difficult.
- Lack of resources for learning English like audio-visual aids, headphones....
- The learners are at different levels of English.
- Some need more emphasis on speaking English, but some need more emphasis on written English (for letters and reports)

AN OVERVIEW OF NEEDS, ITS ROLES IN ESP SYLLABUS DESIGN AND DIFFERENT APPROACHES TO NEEDS ANALYSIS

Needs analysis plays a vital role in the process of designing and carrying out any language course, whether it is English for Specific Purposes (ESP) or General English course, and its focus has been acknowledged by several scholars and authors (Hutchinson & Water, 1987; Richterich, 1980; Berwick, 1989; Robinson, 1991)

According to Berwick (1989), offer definitions of different types of needs and accounts of various problems and limitations in making use of this concept, including ways in which we might usefully distinguish between needs identified by analysts and those expressed or experienced by learners. Needs analysis involves the assessment of the needs for which a learner or a group of learners may require language. As a research area, it started in the early 1970s along with the development of the communicative approach, and has gone through substantial developments in the 1970s and 1980s owing much to the work done by Richterich (1972) and Munby (1978). Proponents of the communicative approach argued that the selection of instructional materials should be based on a systematic analysis of the learners' needs for the target language. All authors seem to agree that it is essential to distinguish between needs, wants and lacks...Needs are those skills which a learner perceives as being relevant to him; wants are a subset of needs, those which a learner puts at a high priority given the time available; and the lack is the difference a learner perceives between his present competence in a particular skill and the competence he wishes to achieve" (Dickinson, 1991: 91). Some authors distinguish between the terms needs analysis and needs assessment - which are often used interchangeably - claiming that „assessment involves obtaining data, whereas analysis involves assigning value to those data" (Graves, 1996: 12). The rationale behind needs analysis is pretty straightforward: people learn a foreign language for different purposes and need it to do different things. The type of language varies along with the learners' needs for the language. So, to design an effective language course, it is critical to know why a learner decides to study a second language and under what circumstances she or he is going to use it. Needs analysis involves "compiling information both on the individual or groups of individuals who are to learn a language and on the use which they are expected to make of it when they have learned it" (Richterich, 1983). A variety of data collecting methods are used in needs analysis such as questionnaires, interviews, and observations. Clearly, the role of needs analysis in any ESP course is indisputable. For Johns (1991), needs analysis is the first step in course design and it provides validity and relevancy for all subsequent course design activities

APPROACHES TO NEEDS ANALYSIS

Basing on learning ESP subject at my university and studying some materials, I will present three approaches to Needs Analysis.

Target situation analysis (TSA)

In the earlier periods, needs analysis was mainly concerned with linguistic and register analysis; needs were seen as discrete language items of grammar and vocabulary. It later moved towards placing the learner's purposes in the central position. Consequently, the notion of target needs became paramount, and research proved that functions and situations were also fundamental. The term Target Situation Analysis (TSA) was, in fact, first used by Chambers in his 1980 article in which he tried to clarify the confusion of terminology. How would you get acquainted with the students' TS? Do you think it is important to prepare yourself for and about it? According to Chambers (1980), TSA is a "communication in the target situation". Robinson (1981, p.8), in the meantime, says TSA focuses on students' needs at the end of a language course. In addition, Munby (1978) present a highly detailed set of procedures for discovering target situation needs, the so-called communicative needs processor (CNP). In his example of adapting the CNP, he explains that a learner who works as a restaurant head waiter has to gain the abilities to attend to customers' arrival, to deal with their orders to server them... Thanks to analyzing these needs, a set of linguistic items, task, skills

and strategies is established to help him perform well in the real context. The information sought for a TSA may refer to different stages in the student's lives. For example, at the first stage of their studies, they need adequate knowledge of grammar and writing ability to pass certain types of examinations. Then they will need to improve good oral performance to attend job interviews and to meet the requirements of their later jobs. Both kinds of these needs should be taken into account when the teachers conduct a training programme. Hutchinson & Waters (1987, p.59) point out a framework for TSA in which the information is collected from the answer for the following questions:

- Why is the language need?
- What will the context areas be?
- Whom will the learners use the language with?
- When will the language be used?
- Where will the language be used?

Learning Needs Analysis (LNA)

Learning needs analyses are undertaken to determine the gap between the existing skills, knowledge and abilities of staff and those that are needed for the organization to function at the desired level. Once this gap is determined, decisions can be taken as to the type of training required (if this is the preferred action) and the form of delivery. Likewise, in an educational setting, a learning needs analysis helps students identify where they are in terms of their knowledge, skills and competencies, versus where they wish to be - what are their learning goals? Hutchinson & Waters (1987, p.62-63) present a framework for learning needs analysis as follow:

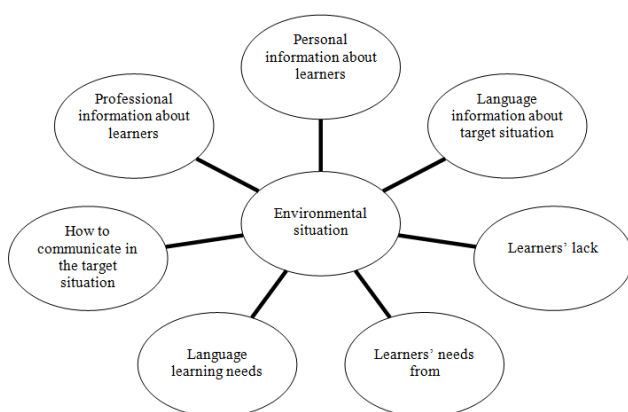
- Why are the learners taking the course?
- How do the learners learn?
- Who are learners?
- Where will the ESP course take place?
- When will the ESP course take place?

Adults learn better when they can see a reason or relevance as to why they are following a program of study. By conducting a learning needs analysis with prospective students, the learning provider can identify what programs are needed. Including learners from the outset will help ensure that course content, schedules, etc., are in line with the needs of the student. By assisting the learner to identify the gaps in his/her own learning, the provider will be better able to support the student. A learning needs analysis will help: Identify what skills and knowledge the learners already have Highlight skills/knowledge/competencies that need developing Identify clearly what students wish to achieve Outline and define expectations and goals Determine what can realistically be achieved given the available resources Identify any obstacles or difficulties which may arise Increase the sense of ownership and involvement of the students Provide information about your student group - know your audience Identify the content that best suits students needs Determine what is the most appropriate delivery format - class based, online or a mix of these and other formats Determine what skill set and knowledge base is required of the tutor Develop a budget and cost benefit analysis Establish when is the most suitable time to deliver the program and over what time frame Ascertain the most suitable evaluation mechanisms Outline what results can be expected and if/how these can be measured Ideally, a learning needs analysis is conducted with a group of students before a course takes place. The consultation determines what type of course is needed. However, in many cases it may not be possible to conduct a learning needs analysis as a prescribed curriculum may be in place, or funding may be secured for

running a predetermined program. In such instances, providers may not have the luxury of developing the content with the students, or of changing elements of the course design. Instead they may need to persuade learners why a particular course is of value. Tutors should still consult the group to determine what their expectations are and to consider the most suitable methodologies to adopt.

Present situation Analysis (PSA)

PSA may be posited as a complement to target situation analysis (Jordan, 1997). It attempts to identify what they are like at the beginning of the course. According to Robinson (1991), a PSA seeks to establish what the students are like at the start of the course, investigating their strength and weaknesses. The PSA seeks information about their respective levels of ability, their view on language teaching and learning, the surrounding society and culture; the attitude held towards English and towards the learning and use of a foreign language. In this study, the researcher uses both needs analysis approaches (target situation analysis and present situation analysis) in the hope to get an overview of students' needs: what is to be learnt and how it is acquired best by students. In other words, the researcher agrees with Brown's idea of needs analysis. He said that "Students have needs and concerns other than linguistic ones. Thus the learners' human needs must also be acknowledged alongside their purely language-related ones...Needs analysis will be defined as the systematic collection and analysis of relevant information necessary to satisfy the language learning requirements of the students within the context of the particular institutions involved in the learning Situation". Dudley- Evans & St John, 1998 assert that people had paid too much attention to the "end-product" for many decades by the target situation analysis, linguistic analyses of lectures, textbooks and articles, and therefore, too little to learning process or skills needed to enable students to reach the target. As a result, there used to be a lot of failure in running ESP course as teachers and course designers neglected factors in the realities. Therefore, the possible problems derived from the learners' factors, local constraints...etc. were not fully anticipated. However, people have recently considered Needs Analysis as a combination of different approaches (Hutchinson & Waters (1987). In addition, Dudley – Evans & ST John (1998) present a current concept of Needs Analysis as the combination of different approaches, and visualize their relation by using the following figure:



What needs analysis establishes (p.125)

As can be seen clearly from the figure above that if a needs analysis is conducted by means of the combination of the three different approaches, a wide range of information is provided to help teachers look at the learners' needs in different perspectives, both subjective and objective way.

A RATIONALE FOR APPROACHES ADOPTED TO CONDUCT A NEEDS ANALYSIS

Business English can undoubtedly adopt the way of course design for ESP. Based on what is talked above, the second approach – skills-centered approach may be the best to assist in my own teaching activity, since it is claimed to take learners more into account than the language-centered approach, because my students, who are the job-experienced learners, have very clear demand for what to be learned, and some of them have set goals for their learning. Thus, it is important and necessary to take the students' practical need into consideration in Business English teaching to make the learners benefit most from the class. Furthermore, as being discussed, skill-centered approaches learner as a user of language rather than as a learner. Process is concerned with are the process of language use, not language learning. In my classroom, all students' goal is to have more chances to practice listening and speaking. What they need is the context to use language, so that they can make more improvement in communication in their working environment. In addition, basing on the need analysis, it is clear that those students just require to focus on the two skills, listening and speaking, which they lack the chance of practicing. For reading and writing, their command is quite good and they do not really need it for their job, therefore, these two skills can be excluded in the learning process. In comparison with the two other approaches, skills-centered one is more advantageous. It tries to build on the positive factors that learners bring to the course, rather than just on the negative idea of "lacks". Therefore, if this approach is adopted to design the course, the course will tend to be more motivating to learners. For all the above-mentioned reason, I believed that skills-centered approach is the best choice in the course design particularly for the group of students described in the first part.

A SAMPLE OF MEANS FOR DATA COLLECTION

According to Tom Hutchinson and Alan Water (1986), there are several ways to gather information about target needs and learning needs such as questionnaires, interviews, observations, data collection and informal consultations. In this study, structured interview is chosen as means of data collection because it can help gather information from the group of the students. Besides, the result of the structured interview is accurate and reliable as the designer has more opportunities to examine the ability of speaking English of learners. After interviewing, the designer will know the way of designing the most suitable course for this course. A piece of the sample questionnaire to collect a Needs Analysis for my target group is given in the appendix (see APPENDIX).

CONCLUSION

It can be seen from this paper that Needs Analysis is considered as a criterion to ESP course design. It is a process which can be conducted by means of different approaches: TSA, LNA and PSA. These approaches should be combined, as I mentioned above, so that the learners' needs can be seen from many sources and by different ways. The aim is to learners as people, as language users and as language learners, to know how language learning and skill learning can be maximized for a given group; and finally to know the target situation and learning environment such that we interpret the data properly (Dudley – Evans & ST John, 1998, p.126). It is worth noting that Needs Analysis can only provide information on the learners' needs. Thus, it is the course conductors and teachers that have to interpret the data properly in order to work out the most appropriate, effective and desirable training-course for the learners. In

conclusion, as a teachers of English, whether we are teaching general English or ESP, We are necessary aware that only when we base our teaching on the learners' needs, can we conduct successful teaching which results in effective learning.

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APPENDIX

Pre-Course Information Questionnaire

Name:
 Institution:
 Position:
 No. of years' work experience:
 Work contact telephone:

1. English language learning background

Please put a circle around the number of which shows your level of English skill for the following situation:

0 = no knowledge 5 = very skilled

SKILL	LEVEL OF SKILL
Speaking English in social situations	0 1 2 3 4 5
Speaking about work in English	0 1 2 3 4 5
Listening face to face	0 1 2 3 4 5
Listening to English on TV/radio	0 1 2 3 4 5
Reading specific content document	0 1 2 3 4 5
Using English on the phone	0 1 2 3 4 5
Writing reports/seminar papers in English	0 1 2 3 4 5
My grammar	0 1 2 3 4 5
My pronunciation	0 1 2 3 4 5

2. Level of English Used in the Workplace

Please rank the English language you use at the moment by circling a number.

0 = not used at work 4 = used frequently

SKILL	LEVEL OF SKILL
Talking on the phone	0 1 2 3 4
Working daily with English speaker	0 1 2 3 4
Interpreting English document	0 1 2 3 4
Reading specific content document	0 1 2 3 4
Engaging in social conversations with foreigners	0 1 2 3 4
Writing reports/seminar papers in English	0 1 2 3 4
Actively participating in discussion at seminars/ conferences	0 1 2 3 4

In what other situation do you use English at work?

3. What specific topics in English do you want to talk about in the course?

- Travelling yes / no
- Environment yes / no
- Public health yes / no
- Economics yes / no
- Trade yes / no
- Sports yes / no
- Others:.....
-
-

4. How do you usually learn?

- By memory yes / no
- By listening and note-taking yes / no
- By reading and note-taking yes / no
- By problem-solving yes / no

Are there other ways of learning that you are used to?

5. What kinds of language learning activities do you want to involve in?

- Speaking with native speaker yes / no
- Pair works discussion yes / no
- Small group work discussion yes / no
- Whole class discussion yes / no
- Role play yes / no
- Oral presentation yes / no
- Research writing yes / no
- Others:.....
-
-

6. What facilities are available for your study at your institution?

- CD- ROM yes / no
- IT aids yes / no
- Cassette –player yes / no
- Over head projector yes / no
- Video recorder yes / no
