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A BRIEF STUDY ON NEEDS ANALYSIS

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Abstract:

This paper aims at meaning of needs analysis from the academic perspectives, its definition, kinds and importance. It also emphasizes the processes and procedures of collecting information from different sources and shows how it affects the material design for curriculum and syllabus, the creationof congenial academic atmosphere and the reduction of gap among learners, teachers and teaching methods.

Key Words: 1.Need 2. Analysis 3. Syllabus 4. Learners 5. Teacher

Introduction:

Needs analysis is a procedure for collecting information about learners and classroom activities to design a syllabus (Nunan 1988). It is an important part for designing a language course. When a language course is designed, it is important for a teacher to have reliable information on their learner variables so that it can reduce any gap among learners, teachers, and teaching materials.

Historical Background of Needs Analysis:

Needs Analysis (NA) has a long history in language teaching. It was first proposed by the council of Europe Modern Language Project group before 1970s. They analyzed the grammatical complexity of sentence structures to design structurally graded syllabus but this syllabus came under criticism because it was not concerned with the learners' needs at all (Fatihi 2003).

Later, at the second phase of communicative approach the syllabus designers began to focus on identifying the learners' needs (Munby cited in Richards and Rodgers 1986). Based on a broad point approach to NA, Munby (1978) developed a NA model which was accepted widely

by the syllabus designers (Fatihi 2003). In Munby's NA model, both the data related to learners' identity and the language needs of the participants were collected (Munby 1978 cited in Nunan 1988).

Over the years a significant shift from a narrow approach to a broader approach regarding NA has broadened the scope of NA and has resulted in a wide range of frameworks for NA. Now different types of frameworks for NA have been designed to identify different types of needs related to the language learning program.

Definition of needs analysis:

Different linguists have defined needs analysis from different perspective. Some of the important definitions of needs analysis given by different linguists are shown in the following table.

Name of linguists	Definition
Nunan, D. (1983)	" Techniques and procedures for collecting information to be used in syllabus design"
Richards, J. (1992)	"The process of determining the needs for which a learner or a group of learners requires a language and arranging the needs according to priorities."
Fatihi, A. R. (2003)	" A device to know the learner's necessities, needs and lacks"
Brindley, G. (1984)	"Learner's wants, desires, demands, expectations, motivations, lacks, constraints and requirements."

From the above discussion it can be said that needs analysis is a process that gathers information from learners, teachers and language courses to find out what language skills the learner's need to develop, why they should develop those skills and how they develop those in the best ways.

Kinds of needs analysis:

Different linguists have claimed different types of NA. Nunan(1988) refers to two types of NA used by syllabus designers. They are:

a) Learner analysis: It carries information about learner.

b) Task analysis: It carries information about the tasks used in the classroom and expected by the learner.

Richterichadvocates two other two types of NA.

a) Subjective Needs Analysis: Subjective needs analysis carries subjective information that reflects the perceptions, goals, and priorities of the learner.
b) Objective Needs Analysis: It carries objective information that includes the factual fact about the learner. For example: biographical information on age, nationality, home language.

West (2003) has developed ideas of NA taxonomies and speaks of the following types of NA:

a) Target Analysis: It identifies the necessities, i.e. what the learners need to know in order to function effectively in the target situation.
b) Deficiency Analysis: It analyzes the gap between the present knowledge of target learners and the knowledge they need to know or do at the end of the program.
c) Strategy Analysis: It identifies the learner's preferred learning styles.
d) Means Analysis: It deals with the logistics, practicalities and constraints of needs based language courses.
e) Language Audits: It is used in forming the basis of strategic decision on language needs and training requirements.

Importance of Needs Analysis:

Needs Analysis is a useful tool to understand students' needs and to help the implementation of educational policies. Nunan (1988) claims that information got through NA can serve the following purposes.

a) NA can set the goals of the course and guide the selection of contents.
b) It can be used by the teacher to modify the syllabus and methodology to minimize the gap between the teachers' and learners' expectation.
c) It may be used to identify the gap between the teachers' and learners' expected teaching and learning approach.

West(1994) states that it helps the syllabus designer to find out the discrimination among various types of learners and to design courses based on their common needs.

Richards (2001) claims that in a language teaching program NA can be used for the following purposes.

a) To find out the required language skills for a learner to perform a particular role, such as sales manager, university student.
b) To find out a gap between their present proficiency level and required proficiency.
c) To find out problem areas of the learners.

Frameworks for Needs Analysis:

Different types of procedures are suggested for conducting a NA. The selection of procedures depends on the purpose of NA. For example: If one tries to conduct a NA of the writing problem of the students at tertiary level, the information can be obtained from the following sources:

a) Samples of student writing.
b) Test data on students' performance.
c) Reports by teachers on typical problems students face.
d) Information from students via interviews and questionnaire.
e) Analysis of text books, teaching and academic writing.

Moreover, Dudely-Evans and John (1998) advocates the following frameworks of NA for the purpose of evaluating learners' and teachers' attitudes, opinions and beliefs towards an intended change or innovation.

a) Information about why the learners are learning English, learners' attitude to learning English, their previous learning experiences and cultural background.
b) Information about learners' preferred learning style.
c) Information regarding the importance of particular skills for the learners and their preferred learning styles for learning those skills.

Nunan& Burton (1985) proposed a NA model based on the subjective and objective information. Their model includes information from the following parameters.

a) Name
b) Age
c) Nationality
d) Education
e) Occupation
f) Proficiency
g) Communicative need
f) Learning goal

Conclusion:

Needs analysis plays an important role in second language or foreign language learning classes. It is important because through needs analysis teachers, learners, teaching materials, teaching procedures-all make a harmonious relationship that enhance learners' learning. But it is a matter of regret that in our country in most cases no study of the language needs of the learners is carried out. As a result teachers do not understand what learners' language needs are. On the other hand learners become confused what they are actually learning and why they are learning so. For these reasons, even after completing graduation, the proficiency level of the learner in English remains poor. But all these problems can be handled effectively through a study of the language needs of the students.

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