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## NEEDS ANALYSIS IN ENGLISH FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES

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### Abstracts

Needs analysis is considered to be the cornerstone of English for Specific Purposes (ESP). This approach assumes that the language teaching will be adjusted to the specific linguistic and communicative needs of the particular learners with special attention being paid to the context in which they use, or will use, English language. In order to tailor the course to the learners' needs, the ESP course should be preceded by an analysis of the learners' needs as related to their future professional work and plans for the future, as well as to their preferred styles of learning. This Needs Analysis should also include within its scope some target situation analysis, which means the identifying of the features of the particular situations in which the students will use the foreign language, and also some discourse analysis, that is to say, the analysis of the language used in these situations. This paper examines a theoretical basis for the methodology which underpins courses of ESP, and explains the concept of Needs Analysis, methodologies and frameworks. It also provides the reader with the concept of ESP, EAP, EOP, and EIL, the role of the ESP teacher (practitioner), and teaching methodology (eclecticism). The paper concludes that Needs Analysis is the foundation on which we can develop curriculum content, teaching materials and methods that can lead to increasing the learners' motivation and success.

**Keywords:** English for Specific Purposes, Practitioner, ESP Learners, Needs Analysis and methodology

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### Introduction

After the collapse of communism in Poland in 1989, a great trend has been observed within the country in the learning of the English language, especially

the English language necessary for academic or professional purposes. The reason for this has been related to the opportunities given to scholars and students to participate in international conferences and projects, as well as the opportunities for them to teach and to study at prominent universities abroad. The work market abroad has been opened up for Polish Specialists in various professions. With the inclusion of Poland to the European Union in 2004, the borders were abolished and visa-free tourism developed rapidly. However, in order to be able to function actively in all these enterprises a good command not only of general English, but also specialist English, is required. This includes the knowledge of vocabulary and linguistic structures used in the target academic and work settings. Nowadays, in this era of global scientific and professional cooperation where English is the leading language both for communication and for the dissemination of knowledge, the need for the courses teaching of a specialist English language (English for Specific Purposes) is stronger than ever before. As a result of all this English for Specific Purposes has developed into being one of the most prominent branches of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). ESP is quite flexible, discipline and it has been defined differently by different people. Zohoorian (2015) has stated that ESP is the teaching of English to the students who have specific objectives and purposes which might be professional, academic, scientific etc. Wu (2012, p. 2) have defined it as the teaching of English for "clearly utilitarian purposes". Both these definitions clearly indicate that ESP is not confined to any specific field, discipline or profession and has a broader area of action. The above discussion transpires that "S" for specific is central to ESP. The same has been stated by Hadley (2006, p. 3) that "the key to teaching ESP is to focus on the "S" for specific. ESP can be differentiated from general ELT by its concern with specialized language and practice". This word "special" might refer to specific needs of the learners or specific language. This confusion prevailed during 1980's and has been reported by Gatehouse (2001). Zohoorian (2015, p. 4) posited that:

The only practical way in which we can understand the notion of special language is as a restricted repertoire of words and expressions selected from the whole language because that restricted repertoire covers every requirement within a well- defined context, task or vocation.

There are two main areas in ESP: *English for Academic Purposes (EAP)*, which prepares students for studying in foreign universities, and *English for Occupational/Professional Purposes (EOP/EPP)*, which prepares learners for

functioning in a particular profession. It covers subjects ranging from engineering, law, medicine or computer science to tourism and business management. The general classification of ESP courses, according to the scientific disciplines or professional areas they cover, is shown in Figure 1.

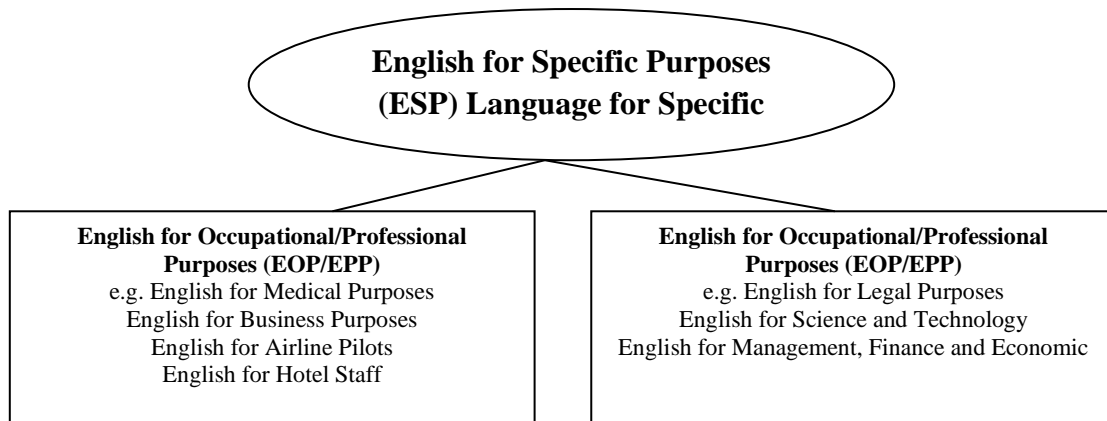


Fig 1. Classification of ESP courses. (adapted from Ewa, 2012)

### Needs Analysis: Concept and Components

In assessing the learners' specific needs we come across the term "Needs Analysis which has been different along the decades. At the initial stages of ESP (the 1960s and early 1970), Needs Analysis is consisted in assessing the communicative needs of the learners and the techniques of achieving specific teaching objectives. Nowadays, the task of Needs Analysis is much more complex: it aims at collecting information about the learners and at defining the target situation and environment of studying ESP. According to Ahour and Mohseni (2015) there are eight components in today's concept of Needs Analysis which have been grouped into five broad areas including:

1. target situation analysis and objective needs analysis (e.g. tasks and activities learners will use English for;
2. linguistic analysis, discourse analysis, genre analysis, i.e. knowledge of how language and skills are used in the target situations;
3. subjective needs analysis, i.e. learners' wants, means, subjective needs-factors that affect the way they learn (e.g. previous learning experiences, reasons for attending the course, expectations)
4. present situation analysis for the purpose of identifying learners' current skills and language use;

5. means analysis, i.e. information about the environment where the course will run (Ahour & Mohseni, 2015).

Because ESP courses are based on Needs Analysis, the learning objectives are more obvious than would be in the case of general English as Second Language (ESL) courses and it can be assumed that students will be more highly motivated in learning about topics and texts which are related to their study or work areas. Gass (2012) distinguished four types of ESP teaching objectives: proficiency, knowledge, affective and transfer:

- a.) *Proficiency objectives* refer to the mastery of the four language skills: reading, writing, listening and speaking.
- b.) *Knowledge objectives* include the acquisition of linguistic and cultural information.
- c.) *Linguistic knowledge objectives* refer to language analysis and awareness of the systematic aspects of language while cultural knowledge objectives refer to the control of socio-cultural rules (mastery of the norms of society, values and orientations and also the ability to recognize culturally significant facts). *Affective objectives* are about the development of positive feelings toward the subject of study.
- d.) *Transfer objectives* are concern with the ability to generalize from what has been learned in one situation or another.

According to these definitions, it is obvious that ESP focuses on relating the teaching and learning of English process to the learners' communicative needs. Faiza (2010) observes that if we know why learners need English, the content of the language can be adjusted accordingly and the teaching process will focus on these needs. In Zahra and Mohammad's (2013) view once identified, "needs should be stated in terms of goals and objectives which, in turn can serve as the bases for developing tests, materials, teaching activities and evaluation strategies. So, Needs Analysis and material evaluation go hand in hand so that Needs Analysis determine the needs for a defined group of people and evaluation helps the teacher determine to what extent those materials, tests or the whole program meet the learners' needs.

Because there are so many various perspectives in defining needs, assessment of the learners/needs becomes a challenging task. Zohoorian (2015), for instance, focused on the selection of the material in Needs Analysis and observed that the

selection of the material in Needs Analysis depends upon the systematic analysis of specific learners' needs by analyzing the reasons for learning, place and time of anticipated target use, others with whom the user will interact, content areas (activities involved), skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing, etc.) and the level of proficiency required. As Flowerdew (2013) observes, needs must be stated in terms of goals and objectives which, in turn, can serve as the bases for developing tests, materials, teaching activities and evaluation strategies.

### **Needs Analysis Methodologies and Frameworks**

Popular ways of conducting a Needs Analysis (NA) are through questionnaires (Bacha and Bahous, 2008; Taillefer, 2007), conducting interviews (Spence & Liu, 2013), combining interviews and questionnaires (Chostelidou, 2010; Deutch, 2003; Jin, Ying & Zhang, 2014), and triangulating interviews and questionnaires with observations (Hyuu-Hyo, 2013; Wu, 2012). Other studies have used largely qualitative measures like ethnographic and sociolinguistic approaches (Johns & Makalela, 2011; Nima & Jooneghani, 2012; Serafini, Lake & Long, 2015). One study reviewed here (Holme and Chalauisaeng, 2006) took a participant appraisal approach, wherein students are lead to conduct their own Needs Analyses. Teachers are often acknowledged as NA stakeholders, their participation is limited to being the subjects of interviews and questionnaires. This becomes problematic when one considers that it is the teachers who will be most responsible for the course after the NA is complete. A common element of the studies listed above, excluding the ones that relied solely on questionnaires, is triangulation. Triangulation is the practice of using multiple measures of collecting data and/or multiple sources for data collection. This practice increases the amount and variety of data the analyst has to work with and increases the credibility, quality, and dependability of the NA and results in a better understanding of learner needs and a more defensible curriculum (Brown, 2009, 2016; Chitpupakdi, 2014). For the purpose of ESP, Brown (2016) lists nine distinct varieties of triangulation that include stakeholder triangulation, method triangulation, location triangulation, time triangulation, perspective triangulation, investigator triangulation, theory triangulation, interdisciplinary triangulation, and participant-role triangulation. The types most pertinent to this study are stakeholder triangulation, "including multiple stakeholders as sources of information;" method triangulation, "analyzing multiple data gathering

procedures;" time triangulation, "scrutinizing data from different points of time;" and participant-role triangulation, "needs analysts switching roles with other stakeholders at a certain point" (Brown, 2016, pp. 141-142).

One possible way of extending participant-role triangulation is through utilization-focused evaluation. Arslan and Coskun (2014) define this as a system of evaluation in which is "done for and with specific intended primary users for specific, intended uses" (p. 37). He explains the value of utilization-focused evaluation by stating:

...evaluations should be judged by their utility and actual use; therefore, evaluators should facilitate the evaluation process and design any evaluations with careful consideration for how everything that is done, from beginning to end, will affect use. Use concerns how real people in the real world apply evaluation findings and experience the evaluation process. Therefore, the focus in utilization-focused evaluation is on '*intended use by intended users*' (p. 37).

For the needs analyst, this could take the form of evaluating initial results of an NA by working with teachers and students to test out objectives and materials. This would also allow stakeholders to take a more active role in conducting the NA. What is surprising is that not many, if any, published NAs report using such an evaluation as part of the analysis. This is even more surprising considering how literature on NA supports this kind of evaluation. Take for example Flowerdew's (2013) flow chart of the stages of curriculum development. Notice that evaluation is "the glue that connects and holds all the elements together," including NA (Flowerdew, p. 217). According to Brown, any element of curriculum development, including NA, would "become pointless" without some form of evaluation (p. 217). More recently, Huhta, Vogt, Johnson and Tulkki (2013), call for something very similar to utilization-focused evaluation in NA by suggesting that planning and enactment should occur together since planning and practice are interrelated and development should come from within the classroom context rather than be imposed from outside. They say that "without enactment, there is no curriculum. A curriculum cannot exist before it is enacted. The processes of planning, enacting and evaluating are interrelated and dynamic, not sequential" (p. 152)

### **Concept of English for Specific Purposes (ESP)**

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) is defined by Richards and Schmidt (2010) as "the role of English in a language course or programme of instruction in which

the content and aims of the course are fixed by the specific needs of a particular group of learners" (p. 198). Brown (2016) notes that the easiest way to understand ESP is to understand its relationship with its opposite, what he calls English with No Obvious Purposes (ENOP). To paraphrase, students in general language courses, or ENOP courses, will learn grammar rules and vocabulary but will do so in contexts unrelated to their specific needs. While this prepares learners for memorizing grammar rules and vocabulary, it does not prepare them for actual, real-life language use. Because of this, "every language course should be considered a course for specific purposes, varying only (and considerably, to be sure) in the precision with which learner needs can be specified" (Shing & Sim, 2011, p. 1). Because the "specific needs of a particular group of learners" must be identified before a course can be labeled as specific, it would be too little to say that NA is important to ESP. It would be more accurate to say that *"NA and ESP are inextricably intertwined"* (Brown, 2016, p. 5, 1). According to Brown (2016), the specific purposes of an ESP course can only be identified through NA, and without NA, there would be no ESP.

### **EAP, EOP, and EIL**

ESP can be divided into at least three main subcategories: English for Academic Purposes (EAP), English for Occupational Purposes (EOP), and English as an International Language (EIL). EAP courses are most often "designed to help learners study, conduct research, or teach in English, usually in universities or other post-secondary settings" (Richards & Schmidt, 2010). Many EAP NAs focus on the immediate academic needs of students within their institution (Vaghari & Shuib, 2013; Rostami & Zafarghandi, 2014; Liu, Chang, Yang and Sun, 2011; Nima & Jooneghani, 2012) while others look for language needs that extend beyond the classroom and into the learners' professional careers (Mohammadi & Mousavi, 2013; Chostelidou, 2010; Gea-Valor, Rey-Rocha, & Moreno, 2014; Liu, Chang, Yang & Sun, 2011).

English for Occupational Purposes (EOP) deals with the language learners needs related to performing their jobs. NAs in this field have covered areas such as workplace needs (Cowling, 2007; Edwards, 2000; Holliday, 1995; Somui and Mead, 2000; Spence and Liu, 2013), industry and business (Huhta, 2010), hospitality and tourism (Aliakbari & Boghayeri, 2014), and healthcare (Khan, Ghulamullah, Mohsin, Dogar, & Awan (2011).

Although less talked about than EAP and EOP, English as an International Language (EIL) is important to consider in ESP and is probably becoming increasingly important with the proliferation of private language schools teaching English as a foreign language. Rather than simply referring to English (or other languages for that matter) as it is used as a lingua franca across borders, "the defining characteristic of an international language rests on its use as the unmarked choice for purposes of wider communication across linguistic and cultural boundaries regardless of whether or not these differences exist within or between national boundaries" (Faiza, 2010, p. 38). Brown (2016) observes that EIL is often useful for situations where traditional notions of target language and culture (i.e. American and British native-speaker cultures) are problematic, decentralized, and no longer an appropriate target for the learners' context. He goes on to state that EIL can be delimited by teaching it through world Englishes, English as a lingua franca, or locally defined EIL. The last of the three is described as a means of delimiting EIL "in which the choices of units of analysis, objectives, content, teaching strategies, resources, models, etc. are all based on carefully considered local needs for English including international use" (Brown, 2016, p. 152).

It is important to note here that, although Brown (2016) lays out a framework for conducting an NA for EIL, none of the literature reviewed for this study is explicitly described as being part of an EIL framework. Although some studies could arguably be described as being related to language for international use (Al-Tamimi & Shuib, 2010; Chitpupakdi, 2014; Gass, 2012; Huhta, Vogt, Johnson & Tulkki 2013), these NAs are not presented as such and tend to focus more on language for general purposes.

### **The Role of the ESP Teacher (Practitioner)**

In teaching ESP the role of the teacher or ESP practitioner (Chostelidou, 2010) is special, as he or she has to perform five important functions:

- a.) teaching (didactics);
- b.) designing the course, the choice and/or preparation of teaching materials;
- c.) co-operation with academic teachers and/or employers;
- d.) carrying out analyses of the students' needs, target situation and discourse;
- e.) providing an evaluation of the students' progress and an evaluation of the course.



The numbers of tasks the ESP teachers have to perform also distinguish them from the General English teachers, who usually realize their programme on the basis of a chosen textbook. Dudley Evans and St John (1998) describe the role of the ESP teacher as being:

- 1) teacher;
- 2) collaborator;
- 3) course designer and materials provider;
- 4) researcher; and
- 5) evaluator.

The first role as a "teacher" is the same as that of the General English teacher. It is the necessity for performing of the other four roles by the ESP teacher that makes for the difference between these two types of teaching. In order to meet the specific needs of the learners and adopt the methodology and functions of the target discipline, the ESP practitioner has to acquire the knowledge of the particular scientific discipline with which he or she is dealing, and understand the problems faced by the professions connected with that discipline. To achieve these goals, collaboration with field specialists (content teachers) and with those who are being taught on the course and who may well be more familiar with the specialized content of materials than the teacher, may well prove to be helpful. ESP teachers do not have to possess the specialist knowledge of the subject matter, but noticing that the students have already gained this knowledge, the teacher may ask them for clarification of some terminology and definitions of some concepts, creating, in this way, a real communicative situation.

ESP practitioners are often required to design courses and prepare teaching materials. One of the problems the ESP teachers face is the assessment and determination of how specific those materials should be. Vaghari, and Shuib (2013, p. 165) state that materials should cover a wide range of fields, arguing that the grammatical structures, functions, discourse structures, skills, and strategies of different disciplines are similar. However, some researchers (e.g. Wu, 2012; Jin, Ying & Zing, 2014; Chitpupakdi, 2014) showed that this is not quite true, since not only the registers of various disciplines are different, but also the rhetoric organization and style of discourse are frequently unique for the given discipline. All these factors should be taken into account when selecting and evaluating the teaching materials (Shing & Sim, 2011). Fortunately, in the field of medicine there are many textbooks which use the topics and the language directly related to this

discipline. However, in order to teach the specificity of written academic discourse in this area, ESP teachers have to study the language of this type of discourse, and on the basis of it develop materials and design activities for students. It is this task where the ESP practitioner's role as "researcher" is fulfilled, which results in providing their students with appropriate materials.

### **Teaching Methodology (Eclecticism)**

Selection of appropriate methodology or methodologies is another integral component of ESP teaching process. Much research has offered deep insights into the fact that no single teaching methodology can be sufficient to address diverse and peculiar needs of ESP learners (Arslan & Coskun, 2014; Aliakbari & Boghayeri, 2014; Wu, 2012; Javid, 2014) and ESP practitioners have to pick and choose from a host of teaching methodologies to run an effective ESP course. The specific demands of modern challenges in the field of ESP have forced ESP practitioners to "move away from following one specific methodology" and select "techniques and activities from a range of language teaching approaches and methodologies" and this trend is termed as eclectic approach (wikipedia encyclopedia). This approach demands that the teacher "decides what methodology or approach to use depending on the aims of the lesson and the learners in the group" (Rao 2001, p. 1). Wu (2012, p. 130) suggested that appropriate teaching methodology should be placed "at the very heart of the operation with course design at servicing its requirements" and to address their specific needs. Aliakbari and Boghayeri, (2014, p. 305) have reported that usually ESP courses are collaboratively run by language teachers as well as content teachers and "ESP requires methodologies that are specialized or unique". Scientific analyses of the diverse linguistic as well as non-linguistic needs of specific learners provide the basic foundation of a successful ESP course because it specifies "what' and 'how' of such courses. Meeting these specific needs requires a selection of methods and approaches. Xiao-yun, Zhi-yang and Peixing, (2007, p. 1) have reported that "eclecticism in language teaching holds that although no single language teaching method manages to meet all the teaching and learning needs, many methods have valuable insights that should be drawn on". It has become an additional burden for ESP practitioners to understand and exhaust different language teaching methodologies and approaches to sort out appropriate components of these by using eclectic approach because one single method or approach suit diverse and specific

learners and teaching contexts (Zohoorian, 2015). Hyuu-Hyo (2013, p. 43) have suggested that ESP learners are required to use English language in a well-defined diverse socio-cultural setting which demands that "all language teaching should be tailored to the specific learning and language use needs of identified groups of students".

Flowerdew (2013) has emphasized the importance of considering the methodological aspects of ESP teaching to cater for the individual needs of ESP learners. Information transfer, information gap, jigsaw, task dependency and correction for content have been identified as five principles to justify the problem-solving and task-oriented nature of communicative exercises (Johnson, 1982). Research has offered valuable insights into the fact that ESP teaching requires diverse approaches and tasks to address diverse needs of specific learners. These tasks and techniques include gaps, prediction, integrated methodology (Mohammadi & Mousavi, 2013), role play and case studies (Nima & Jooneghani, 2012).

Vaghari and Shuib (2013) described the pedagogical history of ELT in China to seek best method. They detailed that various ELT methods and approaches were tried out during the second half of twentieth century. The Direct Method was practiced after the Second World War and it was found unsatisfactory. During 1960s, the Situational Approach gained popularity but met the same fate and the next decade witnessed the proliferation of the Audio-lingual Method and it was found that the needs of ESL learners were not effectively met. It was the dawn of 1980s that the Communicative Approach was experienced to satisfy ESP/EAP needs of ELT learners but it was also not found sufficient to meet the needs of diverse learners and varied learning situations. Research provided sufficient insights that it was the same story of trial and error that was repeated throughout the world to single out the best ELT method to realize the needs of the diverse learners.

A lot of researchers reported that eclectic approach was adopted worldwide to solve this daunting obstacle and it gained popularity. It was declared that maturity of English Language Teaching depended on utilizing an "eclectic blend of tasks each tailored for a particular group of learners" (Brown, 2016, p. 74). Wu (2012) provided a long list of proponents of eclecticism among ESP practitioners, ESL scholars and applied linguists from the western world (Gass, 2012; Hyuu-Hyo, 2013; Aliakbari & Boghayeri, 2014; etc.) and he reported rather a longer list from China. Research provided sufficient insights in to the fact that it was not

only the linguistic needs that needed eclectic approach to be followed but non-linguistic needs should also be taken care of through this dynamic approach. Javid (2014, p. 43) has stated that ESP "learners have diverse language needs as well as they bear differences in their learning styles (LS) due to their diverse educational, social, ethnic and cultural background." Jin, Ying and Zhang (2014) reported that ESP practitioners' teaching should match the learning needs of the learners because any conflict in this regard would adversely affect their teaching performance. He suggested that the teachers should use a variety of activities that would satisfy students' diverse learning styles. It has also been recommended that ESP practitioners "also need to accommodate individual differences of their students by using diverse classroom activities and teaching techniques to ensure efficient and effective teaching (Javid, 2014, p. 59).

It has been identified that local culture and learning setting atmosphere should also be considered for effective learning and the one of the major responsibilities of teachers is that they should select activities according to the above-mentioned factors (Shing & Sim, 2011). Hyuu-Hyo (2013) has reported that language teachers have to explore different teaching methodologies and approaches to adopt them according to the peculiarities of the learners as well as the learning contexts. As the learners' personalities as well as the learning contexts are diverse and peculiar, there is an unavoidable need to choose matching pedagogical methodologies.

## Conclusions

In conclusion, the Needs Analysis helps us as teachers to identify the students' prospective professional needs, the students' needs in terms of language skills and the more reason why some of their needs could be ascertained and determining the objectives of the language course, we can select a material that meets the needs of the students. Thus, Needs Analysis is the foundation on which we can develop curriculum content, teaching materials and methods that can lead to increasing the learners' motivation and success.

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