

A Case Study of Group Needs in an EFL Classroom

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In recent years more and more curriculums have become increasingly more focused on the needs of the learner. Munby in 1978 was one of the first researchers to carry out meaningful analysis of learner needs based on the view that the primary usage for language is communication. The aim of this paper is to examine recent developments in needs analysis, and to incorporate these findings in a EFL classroom to better understand the needs of the students.

To determine the needs and roles of the teachers and learners, needs analysis is often carried out. According to Richards (1990), The first approach may be referred to as situational analysis and involves focusing on the following kinds of questions:

1. Who are the learners?
2. What are the learners' goals and expectations?
3. What learning styles do the learners prefer?
4. How proficient are the teachers in the target language?
5. Who are the teachers?
6. What training and experiences do the teachers have?
7. What training approach do they favor?
8. What constraints (e.g., time, budget, and resources) are present?
9. What kind of tests and assessment measures are needed?

Richards also states that: The second approach, communicative needs analysis (Munby 1978), is concerned with gathering information about the

learners' communicative needs in the target language, and involves questions such as these:

1. In what settings will the learner use the target language?
2. What role relationship is involved?
3. Which language modalities are involved?
4. What types of communicative events and speech acts are involved (e.g., reading, writing, listening, speaking)?
5. What level of proficiency is required?

Brindley (1989) goes a little further and lists three approaches to needs analysis: psychological /humanistic orientation, language proficiency orientation, and specific purpose orientation. The three types differ in their approaches to: educational rationale, type of information, method of collection, and purpose (see Nunan and Lamb 1996: 25).

Class Survey

To better understand the practical side of needs analysis, I decided to divide my class in two sections, giving each a different needs analysis; sample three

(Nunan and Lamb 1996: 36-37), a methodological preference survey, and sample five (Nunan and Lamb 1996: 40-42), a prospective course survey, to my first year college business students. The class consists of 38 Japanese students, two of which have spent at least a year abroad in an intensive English program. The following is the methodological preference survey administered followed by the results obtained:

Sample 3: Methodological Preferences.

How do you like learning? Circle your answer.

1. In class do you like learning
 - a. Individually?
 - b. In pairs?
 - c. In small groups?
 - d. In one large one?
2. Do you want to do homework?

How would you like to spend the time?

- a. Preparing for the next class?
- b. Reviewing the day's work?
- c. Doing some type of activity based on your personal experience, work experience or interests?

3. Do you want to
 - a. Spend all of your learning time in the classroom?
 - b. Spend some time in the classroom and some time practicing your English with people outside?
 - c. Spend some time in the classroom and some time in an individualized language center?
4. Do you like learning
 - a. By memory?
 - b. By problem solving?

- c. By getting information yourself?
 - d. By listening?
 - e. By reading?
 - f. By copying from the board?
 - g. By listening and taking notes?
 - h. By reading and making notes?
 - i. By repeating what you hear?
5. When you speak do you want to be corrected
 - a. Immediately, in front of everyone?
 - b. Later, at the end of the activity, in front of everyone?
 - c. Later, in private?
 6. Do you mind if other students sometimes correct your written work?
 - a. Do you mind if the teacher sometimes asks you to correct your own work?
 7. Do you like learning from
 - a. Television/video/films?
 - b. Radio?
 - c. Tapes/cassettes?
 - d. Written material?
 - e. The blackboard?
 - f. Pictures/posters?
 8. Do you find these activities useful?
 - a. Role play
 - b. Language games
 - c. Songs
 - d. Talking with and listening to other students
 - e. Memorizing conversations/dialogues
 - f. Getting information from guest speakers
 - g. Getting information from planned visits

9. How do you like to find out how much your English is improving?

- a. Written tasks set by the teacher?
- b. Oral language samples taken and assessed by the teacher?
- c. Checking your own progress by making tapes, listening to them critically and comparing?
- d. Devising your own written tasks for completion by yourself and other students?
- e. Seeing if you can use the language you have learnt in real-life situations?

10. Do you get a sense of satisfaction from

- a. Having your work graded?
- b. Being told that you have made progress?
- c. Feeling more confident in situations that you found difficult before?

(Nunan and Lamb 1996: 37-38)

Sample Three Results (N=20)

Question Number	Number of "Yes" responses	Number of "No" responses
1a.	3	17
1b.	18	2
1c.	18	2
1d.	8	12
2.	3	17
2a.	5	15
2b.	11	9
2c.	17	3
3a.	9	11
3b.	13	7

3c.	10	10
4a.	3	17
4b.	8	12
4c.	13	7
4d.	10	10
4e.	13	6
4f.	8	11
4g.	9	10
4h.	9	10
4i.	15	4
5a.	9	11
5b.	9	11
5c.	8	12
6a.	8	11
6b.	9	10
7a.	17	2
7b.	13	6
7c.	17	2
7d.	7	12
7e.	8	11
7f.	16	3
8a.	12	6
8b.	12	7
8c.	16	2
8d.	13	5
8e.	6	12
8f.	11	7
8g.	6	12
9a.	10	8
9b.	17	4
9c.	8	10
9d.	10	8
9e.	15	5
10a.	9	9
10b.	7	11
10c.	12	6

The following is the prospective course survey administered; followed by the results obtained.

Sample 5: Prospective Course Survey

Part I: What do you like to learn?

Indicate your attitude toward the following topic areas by circling the appropriate number (1-5).

- 1- I don't like this at all.
 - 2- I don't like this very much.
 - 3- This is OK.
 - 4- I quite like this.
 - 5- I like this very much.
1. Giving personal information (e.g., name, address, etc.)
 2. Talking about family and friends.
 3. Describing occupations, jobs and work.
 4. Talking about music, movies, TV programs.
 5. Talking about sports and hobbies.
 6. Finding out about/talking about education.
 7. Finding out about/talking about housing and accommodation.
 8. Describing people's dress and appearance.
 9. Finding out about how other young people spend their time.
 10. Finding out about customs and habits of people from other countries.
 11. Finding out about/talking about other cities and countries.
 12. Making complaints/giving advice.
 13. Using the telephone.
 14. Listening to the radio.
 15. Talking about pop stars, film stars and other famous people.
 16. Talking about holidays, festivals, etc.

Part II: How do you like to learn?

Indicate your attitude to the following statements by circling the appropriate number:

- 1- This is never or almost never true of me.
 - 2- This is generally not true of me.
 - 3- This is somewhat true of me.
 - 4- This is generally true of me.
 - 5- This is always or almost always true of me.
1. I don't like to speak in front of the other students.
 2. I like to learn by reading.
 3. I like to learn by listening to and using cassettes.
 4. I like to learn through games.
 5. I like to write everything down.
 6. I like the teacher to explain rules of grammar to me.
 7. I like to work out the rules of grammar by myself.
 8. I like the teacher to explain the meaning of new words.
 9. I like to work out the meanings of words by myself.
 10. I like the teacher to tell me all my mistakes.
 11. I like the teacher to let me find out my own mistakes.
 12. I like to study by myself.
 13. I like to work in pairs.
 14. I like to work in small groups.
 15. I like to work with the whole class.
 16. I like to practice outside of the classroom.
 17. I like to listen and repeat.
 18. I like to memorize conversations and practice them with another student.
 19. I like the teacher to give reasons for what we are learning and how we are learning.

(Nunan and Lamb 1996: 40-42)

Sample Five Results (N=17)

Question	1	2	3	4	5	Average
1			12	3	2	3.41
2		2	7	4	4	3.59
3		3	12	1	1	3
4			3	2	12	4.53
5		1	2	7	7	4.18
6	1	2	9	5		3.06
7		3	9	5		3.12
8		3	7	6	1	3.29
9		1	10	6		3.29
10		2	5	6	4	3.71
11		1	4	5	6	4
12	1	1	8	7		3.24
13	1	1	7	1	7	3.71
14	1	2	2	4	8	3.94
15			2	9	6	4.24
16		2	4	6	5	3.82
Part II						
1	1	5	7	4		2.82
2	1	1	8	6	1	3.29
3	1	3	6	5	2	3.24
4		1	3	9	4	3.94
5		4	7	5	1	3.18
6		2	11	4		3.12
7	1	5	11			2.59
8		1	8	8		3.41
9		4	8	4	1	3.12
10		1	5	9	2	3.71
11		3	8	5		3.13
12		5	9	3		2.88
13	1	2	8	4	2	3.24
14			5	8	4	3.94
15		4	6	5	2	3.29
16	1	4	4	4	4	3.35
17	1		7	8	1	3.47
18	2	5	8	2		2.59
19		2	12	3		3.06

Analysis of the Data

Before I started this project I thought that I could have accurately predicted most of the results of the surveys since I have been teaching this class for more than three years, but to my amazement, the complex and dynamic environment of teaching and learning yielded some very surprising results.

Analysis of Sample Three

In sample number three the biggest astonishment for me was the responses to the question 4i, "Do you like learning by repeating what you hear?", where an overwhelming 79 percent answered yes. I thought that Audiolingualism was dead and buried, but it seems that it still has some merit with many Japanese students. One of the criticisms of Audiolingualism was that it produced parrots who could not use what they learned in real-world situations, but it seems that it still may have some benefits; at least with Japanese students at the upper beginner level.

From hands-on experience, it is my belief that learning by repeating gives the student more confidence and a greater sense of accomplishment. Therefore, more repetition of material is needed in an EFL class vs. an ESL class since students receive very little "real world" exposure to English in the aforementioned.

On the other hand, it was not surprising to learn that only 15 percent like learning by memory (4a). Japanese students are taught at a young age that languages are memorized. This is due to the fact that they must memorize a few thousand characters just to be able to function in society. When it comes to a second language, it appears they do not want to suffer through a similar learning process. But to master a language, a certain degree of memorization is required. Instructors have to find a way to make it interesting and fun to memorize, and should explain to the students why they need to do what they are doing.

Since most communicative tasks require pair or group work, I was pleased to find out that 90 percent of the students favored working in pairs or groups (Q1b, 1c) while only 15 percent liked working individually (Q1a).

When it comes to finding out how much their English is improving (Q9), 83 percent wanted to see if they could use the language they learnt in real-life situations. The sad part about this answer is that there are few real-life situations where the student can use English in Japan. As a teacher, I would like to expose my students to more real-life situations, for example a home-stay in an English speaking country, but these programs are nearly impossible to set up because of the reluctance to take risks because if someone got injured their would be loss of face. The poignant fact is, the best I can do in my present situation is to make the classroom activities as realistic as possible.

Analysis of Sample Five

In the first section, titled "What do you like to learn?" the topics most favored were: talking about music, movies, TV programs (4.53 out of 5), talking about pop stars, film stars and other famous people (4.24), talking about sports and hobbies (4.18), and finding out about/talking about other cities and countries (4.00).

The least popular subjects were: describing occupations, jobs and work (3.00), finding out about education (3.06), finding out about/talking about housing and accommodations (3.12), and making complaints and giving advice (3.24). I conclude from this that students want to talk about what is going on in their lives and not about

something that they perceive as having little immediate value. Today's students live for today, not tomorrow.

In section two, the question 'How do you like to learn?' was examined. The students made it clear that they do not like to memorize conversations and practice (2.59), work out grammar rules by themselves (2.59), speak in front of other students (2.82), and study by themselves (2.88). The validity of question one (I don't like to speak in front of the other students.) could be raised because it is the only negative question asked and may have confused many students.

But the findings from sample five agree with the data from sample three in that the students do not like studying grammar, working individually, and memorizing text.

On the other hand the students indicated they love to learn through games (3.94), work in small groups (3.94), and have the teacher tell them their mistakes (3.71). This also coincides with the data from sample three. It appears that the students preferences were consistent no matter if they completed sample test three or five.

Conclusions

In my case I would argue that needs analysis is a misnomer and actually should be named preference analysis since my students do not have any present or foreseeable future needs for English. As Nunan points out, the only possible rationale for language courses must be an educational one. In other words, learners engage (or more usually, are required by the system to engage) in the learning of a foreign language, not

because there is any likelihood that they will actually use the language, but because it will foster the development of cognitive, affective, interpersonal and intercultural skills, knowledge and attitudes (1998). It now seems even clearer to me that the students' needs must be taken into account when programs are developed and that the future of TEFL lies in a more learner-centered approach.

Answers to surveys like those aforementioned allow all concerned parties to better design the curriculum to meet the needs of all parties involved. But all too often, one or more of the concerned parties has little or no input and the syllabus and curriculum design suffers because of it. It is important that the needs of the teachers (see Reflective Teaching, Richards and Lockhart 1996 page 99 for an interesting survey of EFL teachers regarding teachers' actual primary responsibilities vs. what the teachers think their responsibility should be), needs of the school, needs of society, as well as the needs of the learners be incorporated into the curriculum.

But as Roberts pointed out, needs statements thus represent judgments by the needs analyst as to what should be analyzed, the means to be used, and the meaning and significance of the data collected. Methods employed in gathering data vary according to setting and may involve participant observation, interviews, questionnaires, content analysis of job descriptions and job advertisements, tests, role play, and analysis of communication breakdowns (Roberts 1980; Schroder 1981). From this we can conclude determining needs is certainly not an exact science and data must be analyzed closely.

An interesting study in the future would be to look at the responses of the "good" learners and compare and contrast them to the "poor" learners.

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