

## ESP SYLLABUS: COMPROMISING NEEDS AND WANTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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**Abstract:** Needs analysis is a device to collect the information that will become the basis for designing an effective and efficient language course. Needs analysis may include target situation analysis, present situation analysis, deficiency analysis, strategy analysis, and means analysis. However, needs analysis should not focus only on learners, but should also consider “the views and roles of other stakeholders”, such as the institution, departments, and instructors (Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998; Frendo, 2005). This paper describes the process of designing an ESP syllabus for undergraduate education students on the basis of the needs analysis conducted through (a) a questionnaire given to the students, (b) interviews with the instructors and the faculty’s management, (c) observations in the classroom, and (d) review of the documents. The data were analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively, and resulted in the “target needs and learning needs” (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). Target needs include necessities, wants, and lacks; learning needs refer to what the learner needs to do in order to learn. The results of needs analysis then became the basis for designing a syllabus. The syllabus can be considered as a skills syllabus, which stresses on developing the reading micro-skills of the students in the context of education.

**Keywords:** *needs analysis, target needs, wants, skills syllabus*

English at primary and secondary schools has been designed to equip the students with basic language knowledge and skills. English for undergraduate students should therefore aim at building academic or study skills which can help the students to digest textbooks and references as an integral part of developing professionalism and specialization of their choice. In other words, college English should be taught as English for Specific Purposes (ESP), not English for General Purposes (EGP). Hutchinson & Waters (1987) state that what distinguishes General English from ESP is the awareness of a need (p. 53). Learner needs in General English can’t be specified and as a result no attempt is usually made to discover learners’ true needs. Needs analysis has therefore a vital role in the process of designing an ESP course for undergraduate students.

Designing an ESP syllabus involves examining needs analysis and establishing goals. It entails the selection, grading and sequencing of the language and other content, and the division of the content into units of manageable material. Yalden (1983) sees a syllabus as “an instrument by which the teacher ... can achieve a degree of ‘fit’ between the needs and aims of the learner (as social being and as individual) and the activities which will take place in the classroom” (p.14). In general, a syllabus is “the specification of a teaching programme or pedagogic agenda which defines a particular subject for a particular group of learners . . . a syllabus specification, then, is concerned with both the selection and the ordering of what is to be taught” (Widdowson, 1990, p. 127). Similarly, Nunan (1993) considers a syllabus as a process that “focus[es] more narrowly on the selection of grading and content” (p. 8).

This paper describes the process of designing an ESP syllabus for undergraduate education students on the basis of the needs analysis. English is a 2-credit compulsory course for the education students in the first or second semester at the institution.

### Theoretical Framework

Needs analysis refers to the activities involved in collecting information that will serve as the basis for developing a language program that will meet the needs of a particular group of students. Johns (1991) states that needs analysis is the first step in course design and it provides validity and relevancy for all subsequent course design activities. Needs analysis can include: (a) target situation analysis (TSA) which is concerned with the ultimate purpose of a language course, i.e. learner necessities or objective needs, (b) present situation analysis (PSA) which considers existing learner knowledge, strengths and weaknesses, (c) strategy analysis which establishes the learners’ preferences in terms of learning styles and strategies or teaching methods, (d) deficiency analysis which estimates the learning gap between present needs and target needs, i.e. lacks or deficiencies, (e) means analysis which examines the teaching environment where the language course is to take place and establishes the constraints and opportunities of the course journey, and (f) language audits which include “any large-scale exercise forming the basis of strategic decisions on language needs and training requirements carried

out by or for individual companies, professional sectors, countries or regions” (West, 1994, p. 12). The needs analysis in this paper includes TSA, PSA, strategy analysis, and deficiency analysis.

Hutchinson & Waters (1987) identify target needs and learning needs. Target needs refer to the student needs in the target situation, and learning needs refer to what the students need to do in order to learn. Target needs include necessities, lacks and wants. Necessities refer to what the students have to know in order to function effectively in the target situation. Other experts describe necessities as needs, and Berwick (1989) defines needs as a gap or measurable discrepancy between a current state of affairs and a desired future state. Lacks refer to the gaps between the present situation and the target situation; and wants refer to what the students think they need.

Holliday (1995) considers “wider social factors” as well as the “means for the whole process of realizing a program of language training” (p. 115), while Dudley-Evans & St John (1998) scrutinize differing perceptions held by learners and course designers along with “outsiders” and “insiders” (p. 123). Lately, emphasis has been placed on the views and roles of the stakeholders, be they management, sponsors or human resources departments, regarding the assessment of needs (Frendo, 2005). Similarly, Brindley (1989) believes needs can no longer be viewed as invariable; it is now more important to perceive the needs of all the various parties involved.

Teachers or course designers should therefore consider the needs of all the parties involved in designing a course or syllabus. They should accommodate the needs of the institution and could not at the same time ignore the wants of the students. This paper shows the compromise between the needs of the institution and the wants of the students in designing an ESP syllabus on the basis of needs analysis.

### **Methodology**

The participants of this study were 378 second-semester students of 7 study programs at a faculty of education, 10 language instructors, 7 heads of study programs, 2 heads of departments, 2 faculty’s heads, and the head of the university’s language institute.

The data were collected through (a) a questionnaire given to the students, (b) interviews with the instructors and the faculty’s management, (c) observations in the classroom, and (d) review of the documents. The data collection through questionnaire and interview was administered with a high degree of explicitness which involved the use of formal and structured types of questions formulated in advance (Seliger & Shohamy, 1989; Sommer & Sommer, 1991). There were 10 observations in the study. The documents collected in the study included policy documents, syllabi and lesson plans, instructional materials, and tests and student test records.

The methods of analysis employed in the study were both quantitative and qualitative. The quantitative method of analysis was first used for assessing the responses obtained from the questionnaire; and secondly, the qualitative analysis provided the evaluation and interpretation of the figures and insights gained from the interviews, observations, and review of the documents.

### **Findings and Discussion**

The needs analysis resulted in the target needs and learning needs. The target needs include necessities, lacks, and wants; the learning needs refer to the results of strategy analysis.

The necessities could be indicated by the expectations of the language institute, the faculty’s management and instructors, from the course. As indicated by the course objectives and its instructional materials, the language institute clearly stresses the English course on the reading skill along with grammar and vocabulary aspects. The results of the interview show that 10 out of 12 respondents from the faculty’s management thought that the course should focus on reading so that the students could have easy access to English textbooks to support their study; two others said that the students needed to improve their speaking skill so that they could have a chance to participate in teaching at international-standard schools.

The students’ wants are reflected by the results of the questionnaire. The findings show that most students thought that their immediate future need after they graduate would be reading from internet. Some others mentioned informal oral interactions and reading textbooks. For the long-term future, most students needed English for the following reasons: working with computers, personal development, communication with non-native speakers, and reading English textbooks. The English mastery would help them to have access to information via internet, to succeed in career and study. In terms of speaking, most students thought that oral accuracy was significant. With regard to writing, only few students had frequently written papers.

There was some overlap between the students’ wants and the faculty’s expectations from the English course. Both thought that reading and speaking skills were very important. The students’ need to work with computer could be interpreted as seeking information from the internet to support their study, i.e. reading; and oral communication with other people could be interpreted as speaking. Observations in the classroom confirmed the students’ needs of reading and speaking as they were enthusiastic when they were asked to get information

from the internet and to give oral presentation to the class. In terms of language aspects, both parties also realized the importance of grammar and vocabulary mastery.

The deficiency analysis estimates the lacks of the students or the gaps between the present situation and the necessities. The findings show that most of the students had difficulties in speaking and writing. Some others mentioned listening and reading as difficult. Therefore, most of them considered more practice in speaking, grammar and vocabulary besides reading and writing exercises.

The strategy analysis describes the students' preferences in terms of learning styles and strategies or teaching methods. The findings show that most students preferred to study English at a foreign language institute or have English private classes. Only one third of them considered the English course at the faculty as preferable to learn English. The students preferred to learn English in the classroom under the instructor's guidance or work in small groups; few preferred to study individually or work in pairs. Besides, the students preferred to be corrected by the instructor privately after class. The students considered vocabulary and grammar exercises would be very useful for them; some others mentioned multiple-choice exercises and discussion. Besides, the students preferred to use printed materials, visual aids, video, and computer in learning English. The following tables show the target needs and the learning needs.

Target Needs	
<b>Necessities</b>	
<b>Language skills</b>	: Most reading Some speaking
<b>Language aspects:</b>	Grammar Vocabulary
<b>Lacks</b>	
<b>Difficulties</b>	: Speaking Writing
<b>Practice needs</b>	: Speaking    Grammar Reading        Vocabulary
<b>Wants</b>	
<b>Future needs</b>	: Working with computer Communication in English Reading English textbooks
<b>Oral accuracy</b>	: Very important
<b>Paper writing</b>	: Sometimes

Learning Needs	
<b>Mode</b>	: Instructor's guidance Small groups
<b>Practice &amp; Exercises:</b>	Grammar        Multiple-choice Vocabulary     Discussion
<b>Correction</b>	: by Instructor privately after class
<b>Media</b>	: Printed material Visual aid

### ESP Syllabus

An ESP syllabus was designed on the basis of the target needs and learning needs. The ESP syllabus would stress on two language skills: reading and speaking skills. The reading skill was the needs of the institution, and the speaking skill was the wants of the students. Besides, both the institution and the students realized the importance of grammar and vocabulary mastery to support the two language skills. The following are the course goals, the syllabus, the materials, and the learning activities.

#### Course Goals

By the end of the course, the first-year undergraduate students of education study-programs will:

- (1) develop the reading skill in order to be able to comprehend academic English reading materials in the students' own subject matter. The reading micro-skills include (a) identifying the main idea of the passage and paragraphs, (b) recognizing the organization of ideas in the passage, (c) finding information in a graph, chart, diagram or table, (d) finding explicit details in the passage, (e) finding implicit details in the passage, (f) finding pronoun referents, (g) finding definitions from structural clues, (h) determining meanings from word parts, (i) determining meanings from context, (j) determining the tone and purpose of the passage.
- (2) develop the speaking skill in order to be able to give oral presentations before an audience and to respond to questions. The presentation would include (a) organization (introduction, body, conclusion), (b) pronunciation, and (c) fluency.
- (3) understand English grammatical and vocabulary items in order to better comprehend academic English reading materials in the students' own subject matter

## Syllabus

Syllabus of the English Course	
Meeting 1	Identifying main ideas
Meeting 2	Recognizing organization of ideas
Meeting 3	Finding information in a graph, chart, diagram or table
Meeting 4	Finding explicit details
Meeting 5	Finding implicit details
Meeting 6	Finding pronoun referents
Meeting 7	Finding definitions from structural clues
Meeting 8	Mid-semester test
Meeting 9	Determining meanings from word parts
Meeting 10	Determining meanings from context
Meeting 11	Determining tone and purpose of the passage
Meeting 12	Individual oral presentations
Meeting 13	Individual oral presentations
Meeting 14	Individual oral presentations
Meeting 15	Individual oral presentations
Meeting 16	Semester test

Note: The course is 16 weeks long and meets once a week. Excluding 2 meetings for the mid-semester test and the semester test, the course has 14 meetings remaining. Ten meetings will be used for the ten units of progression to achieve the main goal (the reading skill), and the other four meetings will be for the students' individual oral presentations of about 7 to 10 minutes (5 minutes to give an oral presentation and 2 to 5 minutes to respond to questions)..

### Materials

The core texts of the course are the reading passages in the field of education and the students' subject-matter. The texts are therefore a means to connect the students to their real world (in their study). To some extent, authentic texts from the students' textbooks might also be used in the class. The students are encouraged to contribute the texts to the class. This will have motivational purposes, to give the students some motivation to learn and a sense of belonging to the course.

### Learning Activities

The lesson format of the course consists of the four strands suggested by Nation (2007):

- reading input with a meaning focus, in which the instructor explicitly explains the unit focus,
- language-focused learning taking up language points from the reading, in which the students learn some grammatical and vocabulary items in a reading passage in order to better comprehend the passage,
- meaning-focused output, mainly reading comprehension, often involving pair and group work, in which the students answer reading comprehension questions,
- fluency development through oral presentation, from a selected reading passage of the students' own choice. In the last four meetings before the semester test, the students would do independent activities. They would find a subject-specific reading passage of their interest, read and comprehend the passage, rewrite it in a certain format (introduction, body, conclusion), and then give an oral presentation in front of the class.

### Conclusion

Needs analysis refers to the activities to collect the data that will become the basis for designing a course which aims to meet the needs of learners. However, needs analysis should not only stress on learners but also place some emphasis on the views of other stakeholders, such as the institution, departments, and instructors (Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998; Frendo, 2005). This paper shows the compromise between the needs of the institution and the wants of the students in designing an ESP syllabus on the basis of needs analysis. The ESP syllabus focuses on two language skills. The reading skill was the needs of the institution, and the speaking skill was the wants of the students. The syllabus can be considered as a skills syllabus, which stresses on developing the reading micro-skills of the students in the context of education.

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