The Potential Role of Target Situation Analysis in the Process of Designing EAP Course for Nursing Students at Hebron University

MOHAMMAD K. M. IMHEMMED
MEd TESOL - University of Exeter
Lecturer of English Language
Hebron University, Palestine

Abstract:

The potential role of a target needs analysis seems to help course designers visualising what, where and how the learners will use the language (Hutchinson and Waters, 1987).This seems to be true as target situation analysis aims at understanding what learners need the language for and where it will be used. Moreover, as a part of the target situation analysis, needs analyst and course designers usually look at both the short-term and long-term needs of learners. This comprehensiveness of target situation analysis appears to influence EAP course designers at Hebron University (West Bank - Palestine) when considering what and what not to include in an EAP course for nursing students. It could be seen, from the first glance, that nursing comes in the boundary line between EAP and ESP. Though, nursing students at Hebron University are required to use English during their academic study as well as after graduation (in Hospitals, clinics, etc.). Therefore, this paper seeks at illuminating the potential role and effect of target situation analysis on the process of designing EAP course for the nursing learners. In addition, it puts forward a practical criteria towards taking the first steps in proposing questions and methods for data collection. Though the interest of this paper appears quite specific and focused, the paper will handle EAP, in general, and target situation analysis, in particular, from different perspectives.

Key words: target needs analysis, EAP, ESP, present needs analysis, course design

CONTEXT AND LEARNERS

The place of English as a medium of instruction at the Palestinian universities has witnessed a remarkable shift in the last two decades at the university level. It is now at the heart of tertiary and postgraduate education levels where the majority of the practical, vocational and scientific disciplines are taught and evaluated in English. One of these disciplines is *Nursing*. More recently, the University of Hebron has launched an undergraduate nursing programme which is delivered to learners in English. Learners at the Nursing College are supposed to spend their first year of the programme in studying nursing basics and Latin medical terminologies; and to be prepared to use English for their study. EAP teachers and course designers at the Languages Department have been asked to design a course for the first-year nursing students to meet students' needs in terms of using English during their study and afterwards in the hospitals, the place of practice.

Learners originally are non-native speakers of English though they have a previous experience of leaning English as foreign language (EFL) at the school level. These students are expected to be able to use English alongside medical terminologies during their studies where exams, writing reports, reading books and articles, listening to lectures, etc. will be done and delivered in English. In addition, they are expected to use English outside their course, in the hospitals and/or other medical centres in different forms. For example, they need to be able to communicate with local and foreigner doctors in English, to write medical reports and medical histories in English, and to be able to read recent publications

in the medical filed (which are written and published in English).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Even though the focus of this paper is target situation analysis, it seems to be exigent to have initial thorough understanding of EAP and needs analysis. This might emanate from the complex nature of the field of EAP of which all constituents appear to be structurally interrelated and interdependent. This section provides general overview of needs analysis within the field of EAP. Light will be shed on different aspects of needs analysis and its role in the process of designing an EAP course. It initiates the discussion with a short view of the place of EAP in the EFL contexts. Then different aspects of EAP and needs analysis follow. In the subsequent section, I will present the interrelation between needs analysis and evaluation and the important role of the evaluation on the total process of course design. Finally, the types of needs and types of needs analysis are demonstrated in the last section.

THE PLACE OF THE EAP COURSES IN EFL CONTEXTS

There has been a consensus on the fact that learners in EFL contexts need to be ready to use English prior to the embarkment of their specialties (Braine, 2001). English is used in Palestinian educational context as FL at the tertiary level where many academic and scientific disciplines are delivered to learners in English. Therefore, EAP courses seem to play an effective role in preparing learners for their academic study. Though, the shortage in studies that target EAP field in Palestine is evident, I have found plenty of case studies and published research on EAP in deferent EFL contexts especially in nursing and medical sciences. Some of these studies have emphasised the point that having initial EAP courses prior to

undergraduate medical and nursing studies is apparently essential. For example, Mazdayasan and Tahranian (2008) have conducted a case study on the Iranian context, where English is used as a foreign language. The study reveals that nursing students express their need to master English before they commence, as well as during, their undergraduate studies. An earlier study on another EFL context, the Taiwanese, has been done by Chia at el. (1999). The study has showed that medical studies students, who responded to needs analysis survey questions, stressed the need to be previously prepared to use English, (especially *listening* and reading skills) in their academic studies. Another large scale investigation has been conducted by Evans and Green (2007) to show whether or not EAP in necessary. The study covered views of 5000 students in Hong Kong. The findings indicate that one of main problems Cantonese-speaking students struggle with in their academic studies is the medium of instruction, English. This implies that pre and in-sessional EAP courses are necessary for these students. After all, the recent, growing demand of having sound EAP courses and skillful EAP teachers worldwide, and in Palestine as well, would justify the increasing interests in EAP and language teaching research.

NEEDS ANALYSIS

Literature has recently witnessed a great emphasis on the role of needs analysis as a set of systematic procedures which form the core of an EAP / ESP course design and development (Flowerdew, 2013; Nation and Macalister, 2010; Brown, 1995; Dudley-Evans and St John, 1998). Needs analysis has been always at the heart of course or syllabus design. However, before the arrival of ESP, needs analysis was largely based on teachers' intuition about learners' needs (Hyland, 2006; Braine, 2001). Brown (1995) draws distinction between *formal* and *informal* needs analysis or needs *assessment*. He states that

"needs analysis (in formal and technical sense) is relatively new in language teaching circles. However, needs analysis has been conducted informally for years by teachers who wanted to assess what language points their students need to learn" (p.35). While Hyland (2006) and Braine (2001) confirm that teachers used to figure out what learners need to learn in EAP course through their intuition and common sense, Brown (1995) claims more systematic criteria for intuitive or *informal* needs analysis. He argues that the information sources of such kind of needs analysis might include scores on overall proficiency test, facts gathered from background questionnaires and impression made from personal interviews with course stakeholders.

However, the formal conceptualisation of *needs* and needs analysis have gone through different stages of development where there seems to be no one accepted definition of needs analysis (West, 1994). The discussion of systematically defining needs and needs analysis has started since 1978 when Munby published his book entitled *Communicative Syllabus Design*. Munby (1978), in his attempt to create systematic scheme and guidelines for conducting and applying needs analysis, has offered parameter maps which were set and ordered hierarchically. These starts with participants (learners), communication needs, specific communication needs and ends with specific communicative behaviours or *syllabus*.

Moreover, the work of Nation and Macalister (2010) in defining needs analysis appears to overlap with of Hutchinson's and Waters' (1987). They have categories needs analysis into necessities (What is necessary in the learners' use of language?) and wants (What do the learners wish to learn?). However, Nation and Macalister (2010) add on *lacks* as a third category. Lacks investigation is connected with present knowledge analysis where analysts might want to find out what learners have and able to do with the language before embarking in the EAP course.

More importantly, the needs analysis and evaluation perspective defined by Dudley-Evans and St John (1998) reveals complex interdependence and interrelation of the course design process. They define five stages in which a process of EAP/ESP is initiated and delivered; these are needs analysis, course design, material selection, teaching and learning, and evaluation. In addition, Dudley-Evans and St John (1998) make clear that "these [stages] are not separate, linearly-related activities, rather they represent phases which overlap and are interdependent" (p.121). Furthermore, Dudley-Evans and St John (1998) create a cyclical linkage between needs analysis and evaluation as the following:

> The cyclical presentation of [ESP/EAP process stages] places evaluation and needs analysis, seemingly at opposite ends of a time span, in adjacent positions – and even allows them to overlap. Needs analysis is the process of establishing the what and how of a course; evaluation is the process of establishing the effectiveness. Neither of these are one-off activities – they both need to be on-going. (p.121).

This standpoint paves the way, in the following section, to demonstrate the interrelation of the needs analysis and evaluation. As Nation and Macalister (2010) suggest a criterion of evaluation, they stress the point that needs analysis and evaluation are interdependent.

EVALUATION OF NEEDS ANALYSIS

The needs analysis definition provided by Pratt (cited in Brown, 1995) combines the process of conducting a needs analysis through *array of procedures* with one of the important evaluation aspect, validation. According to Pratt, "needs assessment refers to an array of procedures for identifying and validating needs, and establishing priorities among them" (cited in Browns, 1995: 36).

To understand how and what a needs analysis evaluation is, it might be useful to follow Nation's and Macalister's (2010) evaluation scheme. They divide the evaluation criteria of needs analysis into three parts or stages. They are reliability, validity and practicality, putting *validity* at the centre of their division. By validity they mean that there should be relevance and matching between the type of needs being looked at and the type of information being gathered through the process. According to Nation and Macalister (2010), warn that needs analysis would be invalid when "[letting] practicality dominate by deciding to investigate what is easier to investigate" (p.30). This leads us to define the *practicality of* needs analysis. A practical needs analysis, according to Nation and Macalister (2010), is not time-consuming, not expensive and provides clear, easy to understand results. Practicality in needs analysis could also facilitate incorporating the result into the curriculum design process. Finally, the third aspect of needs analysis evaluation is reliability. A reliable needs analysis, according to Nation and Macalister (2010), "involves using well-thought-out, standardised tools that are applied systematically" (30). It seems to be more useful and effective for the syllabus design process, for example, to systemise the observation, as a method for data collection, by using a checklist and applying standardised analysis procedures.

Brown (1995) draws a distinction line between the process evaluation and product evaluation. What is meant by process evaluation, according to Brown (1995), is the evaluation that is aimed at the workings of the programme. On the other hand, he refers to the product evaluation as "[any] sort of evaluation that in which the focus is on whether the goals (*products*) of the programme are being achieved" (Brown, 1995:227). It seems to be, from the first glance, that needs analysis evaluation falls in the first category, i.e. the process analysis, as needs analysis comes in the initial stages of any syllabus design process. However, many specialists of the EAP

and ESP note that needs analysis alongside evaluation comes and recur in the all stages of curriculum or course development (Flowerdew, 2013; Nation and Macalister, 2010; Hyland, 2006; Dudley-Evans and St John, 1998).

TYPES OF NEEDS AND TYPES OF NEEDS ANALYSIS

The reason behind presenting types of needs and types of needs analysis in one section, and not having them separated is ostensibly due to the logical connection between the two. In other words, the needs type is likely to determine what kind of analysis is required to meet these needs. Hyland (2006) sheds light of ampleness of term needs. He states that

> Needs is actually an umbrella term that embraces many aspects, incorporating learners' goals and backgrounds, their language proficiency, their reasons for taking the course, their teaching learning preferences, and the situations they will need to communicate in. Needs can involve what learners know, do not know or want to know, and can be connected and analysed in variety of ways. (pp. 73-74).

According to Dudley-Evans and St John (1998), there seems to be a complex plethora of different terms related the concept needs. They stated that needs could be described long-terms or short terms. Needs also can be seen as objective, subjective, perceived and felt. In addition, needs could be seen in light of target situation (product-oriented) and learning situation (process-oriented). They can be also categorised under what have been previously mentioned as *lacks, wants* and *necessities* (Hutchinson and Waters, 1987; Dudley-Evans and St John; 1995; Nation and Macalister, 2010).

Hutchinson and Waters (1987) have an early distinction between two main types of needs analysis. They are *present needs analysis* and *target needs analysis*. Present needs analysis seeks answers to questions such as "why are the

learners taking the course? How do learners learn? Who are the learners? What do learners know?" (cited in Hyland, 2006: 75). On the other hand, target situation analysis looks at the reasons and the situations that learners will be using the languages for and in (examination, postgraduate or undergraduate course, etc.). It also specifies what language genres and for which content areas (specialities and disciplines) English will be used. Finally, target situation analysis investigates where learners will use English (community of practice).

1.   The target needs analysis of nursing EAP course

Based on the above, target needs seem to be both subjective and objective. They are subjective in a sense that they address learners' wants and lacks while they could be also objective because they look at what sort of language will be used in the target situation (Dudley-Evans and St John, 1998). Brown (1995) makes clear that there seems to be no absolute dichotomy between situation needs and language needs. According to Brown (1995), both are rather interrelated and come under the umbrella of *target situation analysis*. He specifies that situation needs are human-based in the sense that they provide information and insights about the physical, social, psychological context in which learning takes place. On the other hand, language needs, according to Brown (1995), are concerned with circumstances in which English will be used, the target linguistic behaviours, the learners' reasons for studying the language and the present abilities with respect to those reason, and so forth.

More importantly, defining what target needs may facilitate the process of defining the type of information required from the process of target needs analysis. Referring back to the focus of this paper, target situation analysis of EAP course for nursing students, would initiate the research questions for that analysis. Nation and Macalister (2010) state

that "because needs analysis is a kind of research, it is important to get research questions right as soon as possible and use these to guide the choice of the methods of data gathering" (p.30). At this stage, research questions for the target needs analysis could be fall in three categories:

A. Language Needs:
- What sort of language tasks will the nursing learners deal with during their studies?
- What language skills are used the most in their studies?
- Are the lectures delivered to the students in the native language or in English?
- Do the learners have to write assignments, reports, answer exams etc. in English?
- Is English the medium of communication during the tutorials?

B. Learner's Wants and Lacks:
- How competent or proficient are the learners in English in general?
- To what extent are the learners able to write (for example) medical reports in proper English?
- What do learners expect to have in the nursing EAP course?
- What do learners wish to achieve after completing the course?

C. Target Needs
- To what extent will the learners use English during their university study?
- What types of activities, tasks, assignments etc. will learners engage in during their study?
- Will learners carry on using English after finishing their study at the university?
- Where else do they need to use it?

- What kind of language skills, tasks, etc. are usually used in the community of practice or workplace (e.g. hospitals)?
- What kind of assessment criteria are adopted and applied in the nursing course?

METHODS AND DATA GATHERING

According to Long (2005), Brown (1995) and Nation & Macalister (2010), there are set of tools and information sources that needs analysts could rely on. These include interviews, questionnaires and surveys, text and discourse analysis, document analysis, published and unpublished literature, tests, etc. Long (2005) makes clear that these tools could be used solely or in combination with other tools. In addition, he draws the attention to the fact that these tools and methods could be utilised either inductively or deductively. Flowerdew (2013) explains that "[inductive procedures] includes experts intuition, participants and non-participants observation, and unstructured interviews, while [deductive procedures] involves surveys and questionnaires, and less commonly criterion-referenced performance tests" (p.330).

In relation to the research question stated in the previous section, the three categories, language needs, learner's wants and lacks, and target needs appear to require different tools to be achieved effectively. It would be important to keep in mind Nation's and Macalister's (2010) the practicality part of their evaluation approach. According to Nation and Macalister (2010), the process of needs analysis should maintain practicality. For example, "[it] should not be expensive, does not occupy much of the learner's and teachers' time, [and] provides clear, easy-to-understand results" (Nation and Macalister, 2010: 30-31).

In regards to the first category of research questions, language needs, unstructured interviews, and text or document analysis. The answers of the questions that address the language tasks and the learners' use of English during their undergraduate studies could be sought after through interviewing nursing department staff, lectures and graduate students. Such kind of required information seems to be easily elicited from asking the involved people as they seems quite knowledgeable about what learners will experience through their studies. It is worth to mention that Guba (cited in Flowerdew, 2013) suggests that "unstructured interviews are appropriate when the interviewer *does not know what he or she does not know* and must therefore rely on respondent [the interviewee] to till him or her" (p.330).

Moreover, analysis of the nursing course exams, previous student's assignments, reports, coursebook, etc. would foster the validity of the information elicited from the interviews. Needs analysts and course designers need to know more about the nature of the nursing course materials and tasks, and how the learners will interact, respond and communicate with these materials and tasks. This kind of information might give course designers insights towards designing effective EAP course which is mainly addressed to fitful learners' needs and help them finish their studies successfully.

In respect to second category of the research questions, learners' wants and needs, diagnostic test and questionnaires tend to be effective and useful to seek answers of the these questions. First of all, using a diagnostic test to assess the general English proficiency of learners is apparently helpful and provides authentic consideration about learners' performance. The test would also give the analysts the opportunity to observe directly the learners' performance with English. In addition, the test result analysis could offer more information about students' weaknesses and strengths in different language skills.

Second, surveying the learners and asking them about their attitudes and expectation leans towards knowing more about learners as they are the central of the learning process. In addition, questionnaires, according to Brown (1995), are very effective research tools for gathering information on large scales. Therefore, using questionnaires will help to reach and cover the possible maximum number of nursing students at Hebron University. However, according to Nation and Macalister (2010), during the process of designing questionnaire items, needs analysts (or the designer) should keep in their consideration that questionnaires should not be time-consuming (take short time to complete) and should include both structured and open question items. This is to give the learners adequate space to express their wants, attitudes and ideas.

Finally, the third category of the research questions which address the target needs questions could be approached through a combination of tools. For example, to gather information about the use of language outside the nursing course, it seems to be efficient to meet nursing practitioners in their workplaces and observe them while working. Meeting professionals and practitioners in their workplace tends to provide needs analyst with sound and authentic information about what will learners engage in after graduation (Flowerdew, 2013). In addition meeting the nurses and ask them questions about their experiences with English in their studies and workplace appears to be integrally effective. Analysts could ask nurses questions that make them reflect on their precious experiences with English. Examples are what language difficulties did you face when you start working in the hospital? Above all, staff meetings and workplace observations would quip needs analysts with the knowledge of which is and which is not necessary to include or exclude in the nursing EAP course. Finally, the documents and text analysis previously mentioned in the methods of first category questions (Language

Needs) could also help to find more about the nature of the engagement and interaction of students and English during their academic studies.

To sum up, the discussion about the potential role of the needs analysis, in general, and target situation analysis, in particular, reflect the importance of this analysis in the course design and development. It seems to serve as the starting point of any creation of EAP or ESP course. In addition, the recent development and systematicality in the field of needs analysis could help EAP course designers to work towards better EAP learning experience.

REFERENCES

1. Braine G. (2001). Twenty years of needs analysis: reflection in personal journey. In J. Flowerdew and Peacook, M. (Eds.), *Research Perspectives in English for Academic Purposes* (pp. 195-207).Cambridge: Cambridge university Press.
2. Brown, J. (1995). *The Elements of Language Curriculum*. Boston: Heinle.
3. Chia, H., Johnson, R., & Olive, F. (1999). English for College Students in Taiwan: A Study of Perceptions of English Needs in a Medical Context. *English for Specific Purposes*, 18(2) 107–119.
4. Dudley-Evans, T., & John, M. S. (1998). *Developments in English for Specific Purposes*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
5. Evans, S., & Green, C. (2007). Why EAP is necessary: A survey of Hong Kong tertiary students. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes, 6*, 3-17.
6. Flowerdey L. (2013). Needs Analysis and Curriculum Development in ESP. In B. Palridge and Starfield, S.

(Eds.), *The Handbook of English for Specific Purposes* (pp. 325-346). New York: John Wiley.

7. Long, M. (Ed). (2005). *Second Language Needs Analysis. Cambridge: Cambridge university Press*

8. Hutchinson, T., & Waters, A. (1987). *English for Specific Purposes.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

9. Hyland, K. (2006). *English for Academic Purposes.* London: Routledge.

10. Mazdayasan, G., & Tahranian, M. (2008). Developing a profile of the ESP needs of Iranian students: The case of students of nursing and midwifery. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, 7(4) 277–289.

11. Munby, J. (1978). *Communicative Syllabus Design.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

12. Nation, I., & Macalister, J. (2010). *Language Curriculum Design.* New York: Routledge.

13. West, R. (1994). Needs Analysis in Language Teaching. *Language Teaching*, 27(3) 1-19.