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THE INSTRUMENTAL USE OF CONDUCTING NEEDS ANALYSIS IN ESP COURSES: A TAXONOMIC INTRODUCTION

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ABSTRACT

Needs analysis is a prime requisite to understand the objective of language learning. It is also significant to understand the pedagogical underpinning of designing a syllabus for ESP courses. The ends-means approaches are more considerably acknowledged in understanding the actual needs of the learners in context to their objective and goal of learning situation and learning situation. Further, the target use of language is widely reflected in ESP courses. This paper highlights the taxonomical classifications and the development of needs analysis for conducting needs based ESP courses.

KEYWORDS: English for Specific Purposes (ESP), Learning Objectives, Needs Analysis (NA), Present Situation Analysis (PSA), Product and Process Approaches, Target Situational Analysis (TSA)

INTRODUCTION

The global use of English in academic, professional and technical contexts has revitalized communicative competency in developing needs based ESP courses. The demand for ESP courses are widely found due to the increase of overseas higher education, commerce and industry. ESP courses are widely recognized to adopt glocal perspectives in context to academic, social and workplace. The need for syllabus change and revision are subjected to the review of the students and their target situational demands. Needs analysis (NA) is obligatory as it determines the objective of the ESP course design (Schutz & Derwing, 1981).

It evokes purpose based language learning and informs the nature of the language, learner and learning needs. Their present and target situational influences reflect the need of learning objectives and learning strategies in designing the product and process orientations of the course. Widdowson (1983) distinguishes the role of means and ends in defining needs to its present and target situational use.

Needs analysis is introduced to analyze the general and specific purposes of the language course. It is found evolving around with the favourable movements of CLT and ESP in particular. Its effect on ESP course construction is more related to understand the communicative capability and competency level of the students. Berwick (1989, 65) considers needs as "the gap between what is and what should be". Berwick distinguishes 'felt needs' and 'perceived needs' to understand the learners difficulties through their own insights and others perceptions on their learning process. The 'subjective' and 'objective' needs of the course explain the personal, social, cultural and professional needs of the students (Brindley, 1989). The perceptions of the learners on their language awareness and learning pursuits and their interests, want and require can be termed as "personal needs". And the perspectives of the management personnel and the language experts on the learners' experiences and their demands can be referred as "professional needs". It can be conducted with the approaches to language, learner, learning and situational contexts and can be classified as

Present Situation Analysis (PSA)

Hutchinson & Waters (1987) and Jordan (1997) considered learning centred approach as the principal factor to conduct present situation analysis. Language courses related to English for Academic Purposes (EAP) reflect on the learning situation and articulate more on the institutional factors.

Target Situation Analysis (TSA)

With the attempts of Richterich & Chancerel (1980, cited in Stern, 1983) and the language experts of the Council of Europe team, target situational analysis is recognized as the foremost step in designing a course for general purposes. Munby (1978) proposed Communication Needs Processor (CNP) to analyze the target situation of the learners. By collecting various sources of information about the learner, learner profile is created and processed to analyze the communicative needs of the learner. Chamber (1980, cited in Stern, 1983) considered target situational analysis as synonymous to needs analysis to understand the objectives for learning specific purpose based language courses.

Deficiency Analysis

Students' lack and learning deficiencies can be quite assessed through assessing the learning needs of the students. 'Learning needs' and 'target needs' can be generally distinguished with the requirements found in the present and thetarget situation (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). This equips the learner to be aware of why, what and how to learn in the present and target situational contexts.

Pedagogic Needs Analysis

West (1994) and Jordan (1997) discriminated the types of needs analysis and considered the importance of pedagogic needs analysis to understand the teaching learning process in the due course of the ESP program.

Strategy Analysis

Allwright (1979) discriminates the learning strategies and preferences of the learners and consider their interests, needs, want, desire, lacks and deficiencies in analyzing the learning needs of the students.

Means Analysis

Dudley Evans & St. John (1998), Long (2005) considers the process involved in language learning. Needs analysis can be done through formal or informal or both (Hyland, 2003). Formal needs based survey questionnaire, observations and interviews are widely preferred to analyze the needs of the stakeholders involved in a language course.

Language and Linguistic Analysis

The use of structures for gaining language proficiency and linguistic competency reflect the role and significance of language needs in both present and target situations. The proposal of Canale & Swain (1980) on communicative competency is widely followed to acquire linguistic, discourse, sociolinguistic and strategic competence. Further, the use of genre, task, skills, content, topic and theme are pursued to develop competency in specified performance based language learning.

Register Analysis

Widdowson (1983) considers register as the significant element in analyzing discipline oriented content based language teaching. This is particularly essential in technical and medical oriented needs based courses to analyze the use of register in their communicative contexts (Trimble, Trimble & Drobnic, 1978).

Discourse Analysis

Harris (1952, cited in Howatt, 1984, 330) and Widdowson (1983) articulated discourse as an essential factor in communication. With the contributions of Widdowson (1978, 1979, 1983), discourse has emerged as a major element in articulating the use of the language.

Genre Analysis

Swales (1990) recognized the use of academic genres and Bhatia (2008) reflected on the use of specific professional genres in ESP courses. The contributions of Halliday (2001) led genre based language pedagogy in facilitating the generic knowledge to the learners. The evolution of needs analysis attributes in understanding the nature of language, learner, learning and contextual needs. Needs analysis specifically examines how it informs the purpose of language education. In the academic or workplace environment, the student needs to reveal their language awareness and their motivation level in learning ESP courses. And they should be able to reflect their use of language and capability in communicating in the present and target situational contexts. Needs analysis needs to be conducted through the participation of all the stakeholders and involving them throughout the course. The perceptions of the students and the institutional and industrial personnel are essential to understand the language needs in academic, social and professional contexts.

The reflections of the stakeholders and the learning issues in context to the situations need to be thoroughly analyzed in the beginning, middle and at the end of the course. What the students need to learn and how far they are able to perform with the given objectives and means of learning needs to be thoroughly analyzed throughout the language course. The coordination between researchers, teachers, institutional and industrial management personnel in analysing the needs of the learner is crucial to understand the needs of the students in both learning and workplace contexts. Brindley (1989) and Berwick (1989) consider 'gap analysis' as the major factor in articulating the limitations and revision of the course. As it is often interrelated with the curriculum planning, implementation, evaluation and revision of the course, it stands as an extremely essential tool in redesigning language courses (Nunan, 1988; Brown, 1995).

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