

# The Exploration Of Need Analysis In English Language Teaching: Teaching Reading Skill

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## Abstract

Needs analysis is generally believed to be important in ESP/EAP context because it enables practitioners and materials writers to explore their learners' significant needs. Therefore, the study aims to explore the need analysis in teaching reading in English language teaching. Needs analysis has to be encouraged and learners' needs have to be explored. Teacher has to be involved in doing the need analysis. The results demonstrate that EFL learners have difficulty in reading, especially in comprehension.

Keywords: *need analysis, reading*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

English language teaching (ELT) is a progressive field that often witnesses revolutions and innovations. Teachers, researchers, and practitioners are in continuous search for the best teaching materials and practices that can help learners succeed in their language learning and meet the market and employment criteria. In the globalized era, much information has been being exposed in many mass media, textbooks and journal articles, moreover on internet. Everyday we face million of text and most of them are written in English. They have been already customized by EFL learners in searching information of references related to their study. Benhart (2011:19) states that millions across the globe routinely access expository information from the internet written in English a second language for the overwhelming majority. Reading is an important language skill for EFL learners in Higher Education in exploring information as references and additional materials for their study. One of the essential skills for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students need to acquire is the ability to comprehend academic texts (Dreyer & Nel, 2003). In other words, reading is one of the important language skills needed by EFL learners to get their

expectations for their concerns. Reading is assumed as the most critical skill to gain knowledge of their discipline for university students in higher education today (Safdarian, et.al.: 2013:121). Reading becomes a path to get knowledge as an input in interpreting a phenomenon or situation. When learners read an academic text more, they enable to express their ideas into written text or well-structured speaking connected to the main discussion. In the other words, reading is an activity that will be a way to fulfill learners' expectations for their academic needs. Grabe (2009) view reading as the most important skill required of people in multicultural and international settings, academic learning, and self-study situations.

This significant move in response to the language learners' needs has been further motivated by the emergence of the communicative language teaching method (CLT), which stressed the significance of learners' knowledge of both language forms and their relevance to the context of their use. Brown (1995, p. 36) states needs analysis is "the systematic collection and analysis of all subjective and objective information necessary to define and validate defensible curriculum purposes that satisfy the language learning requirements of students within the context of particular institutions that influence the learning and teaching situation." Need analysis has often been used in foreign language education to discover the particular language skills that the students need and the particular challenges they encounter in improving their language competence (Kikuchi, 2005; Taillefer, 2007; Xiao, 2006). It includes the study of present needs (Richards, 2001) and potential needs (Chen, 2006; Kaur & Clarke, 2009). As stated by Richards (2001), "different types of students have different language needs and what they are taught should be restricted to what they need" (p. 32). Also, "the problems are unique to specific learners in specific contexts and thus [they] must be carefully delineated and addressed with tailored-to-fit instruction" (Belcher, 2006, p. 135), which can determine the content of any course as well (Richards, 2001).

There are some previous studies about need analysis. First, the study by Sieglöva (2019) discusses the role and importance of motivation in educational practices and contrasts it with a student perspective collected from a needs analysis study and the corresponding set of teaching techniques to help teachers enhance student motivation and active involvement. The second previous study is done by AlGhamdi (2018). The study is to do a reading needs analysis of preparatory-year students in the Saudi context. Third, the previous study was conducted by Helalludin (2020). The study

aimed to investigate the needs of students and lecturers in writing instructions using the process genre approach. From those previous studies, the study on the exploration of the need analysis in teaching reading has not been conducted yet. The research aims to explore the need analysis in teaching reading in English Language Teaching.

## **2. RESULT**

### **The Definition Of Need Analysis**

Defining needs analysis has generated controversy because linguists in the ESP field have not yet agreed on the definition of the term 'need' itself. Richards as cited in Al-Harby, (2005, pp. 15-16) argued that the definition of 'needs' depends on the perception of those making the judgment. Teachers, learners, administrators, employees, parents and stakeholders may have different views as to what 'needs' are. Needs analysis is defined by Nunan (1988) as an information gathering process when he referred to needs analysis as "techniques and procedures for collecting information to be used in syllabus design"(p. 13). Thus, needs analysis is a prerequisite for any ESP/ EAP course design to achieve effective instructional outcomes and to deliver appropriate input. Richards & Platt, (1992, p. 242, cited in Al-Tamimi & Shuib, 2007) further defines need analysis as "the process of determining the needs for which a learner or group of learners require a language and arranging the needs according to priorities" (p. 1). Hutchinson & Waters (1987) defined needs analysis by distinguishing between target needs, i.e., what the learner needs to do to learn, and 'wants', which represent the learners' views regarding their needs. According to the authors, target needs include 'necessities', which refer to what the learner has to know to function effectively in the target situation. While, 'lacks' refers to the need to understand what the learner already knows to decide which of the necessities the learner actually 'lacks' (pp. 54-56). All the definitions mentioned above have many things in common in that they focus on the learners' needs as a source of information for designing syllabus or developing materials that fit the learners' actual needs.

### **Purpose of Needs analysis**

Needs analysis in language teaching may be used for a number of different purposes, for example:

- To find out what language skills a learner needs to perform a particular role, such as sales manager, tour guide, or university student
- To help determine if an existing course adequately addresses the needs of potential students.
- To determine which students from a group are most in need of training in particular language skills.
- To identify a change of direction that people in a reference group feel is essential.
- To identify a gap between what students can do and what they need to be able to do.
- To collect information about particular problem learners are experiencing (Richards, 52).

### **Needs Analysis in English Language Teaching**

It is important to understand how students' perceived language needs change throughout their English language studies at one institution. This is possible by identifying the students' background and then conducting repeated measures of the students' perceived English language needs. Furthermore, determining the factors that cause changes in the perceived language needs would also serve as constructive information for curriculum review. The process of collecting English language learner needs, including real linguistic needs as well as wants and desires, is now considered increasingly important in creating English language programs. Due to the ever-changing learner, societal and institutional factors, current English language programs need also to include needs analysis as part of routine program review. Identifying and confirming the students' various perceptual needs and wants at one institution. It is hoped that the description and analysis of the current needs analysis will be conducted at all levels (schools, colleges and universities).

The inclusion of needs analysis in second language curriculum development began in earnest in the 1960s as language programs emphasized English for Specific Purposes (ESP) instruction (Richards, 2001). The types of needs analysis for ESP focuses on gathering detailed language used for vocational or other specific language needs.

An essential principle of ESP approaches to language teaching is that the purposes for which a learner needs a language rather than a syllabus reflecting the structure of general English should

be used in planning an English course. Rather than developing a course around an analysis of the language, an ESP approach starts instead with an analysis of the learner's needs. Schutz and Derwing (1981, 30) point out that this was a new concern with ESP: "most language planners in the past have bypassed a logically necessary first step: they have presumed to set about going somewhere without first determining whether or not their planned destination was reasonable or proper." Different types of students have different language needs and what they are taught should be restricted to what they need. These needs are fairly specific; they can be identified and they should determine the content of any course.

## **Reading**

Mastering reading skill requires interaction between the reader and the text. The reader has to decode the meaning of the written words to be able to understand the writer's point of view. Rivers (1981) said that "reading is the most important activity in any language class, not only as a source of information and a pleasurable activity, but also as a means of consolidating and extending one's which are knowledge of the language" (p. 147). Readers have to use their prior knowledge while reading in order to construct meaning. Goodman (1973) declares that the learner "interacts with a message encoded by the writer. He concentrates his total prior experience and concepts he has attained, as well as the language competence he has achieved" (p. 162). Ehri (1991) reported four different ways to read words; decoding, reading by analogy, reading by the prediction made from context and sight word reading. On the other hand, linguistic comprehension, which is often operationalized using listening comprehension tasks, is defined by Hoover and Gough (1990) as "the ability to take lexical information (i.e. semantic information at the word level) and derive the sentence and discourse interpretation" (p. 131). Several studies have shown that decoding and linguistic comprehension represent more than 70% of the variance in reading comprehension (Catts, Hogan, & Adlof, 2005).

## **Reading Comprehension Processes**

Reading is useless without comprehension. In fact, the comprehension process needs a certain input (text) to build vocabulary and interact with the meaning conveyed in the text. Many significant studies indicate the relationship between reading comprehension and second language

development. A study conducted in a Canadian university on 37 adult learners in a comprehension-based class and 18 in the four-skill comparison class reveals that the comprehension-based class made gains in discourse knowledge, while the four-skill class made gains on content words and that comprehension-based programs developed learners' proficiency (Paribakht, T. Sima; Wesche, Marjorie Bingham, 1993, pp. 13-23). It is important to keep in mind that schemata are interrelated to reading comprehension because background knowledge aids comprehension and input. It is vital to inspire ESL readers to follow a reading strategy and activate schemata to become better readers (Stott, 2001, p. 4). Furthermore, a study on English learners in the United States provides advice to practitioners and TESOL researchers about how students learn to read in English in order to decide on the best types of activities, e.g. bottom-up models, top-down models, and interactive models (Burt, Miriam; Peyton, Joy Kreeft; Adams, Rebecca, 2003, pp. 5, 24). Additionally, another study on English learners in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia discusses cognitive tasks involved in reading that teachers use in their instruction, and the findings support the importance of the fluency stage of reading and word recognition (Alyousef, 2006, pp. 64, 70). A survey-based study on 420 ESL-certified teachers in New York highlights scaffolding and reveals that higher-level questioning, graphic organizers, informal assessment, underlining, and pre-reading activities enhance reading comprehension (White, 2016, pp. 79-83)

## **Reading Strategies**

Teachers apply reading strategies to their learners, but are they aware of those? To answer this question, it should be known that reading strategies are cognitive and metacognitive; the cognitive reading strategies is the implicit application of these strategies, whereas the metacognitive reading strategies are the knowledge of how reading strategies are applied. Brown (2001), for example, points out that "reading comprehension is a matter of developing appropriate, efficient comprehension strategies" (ibid P. 306). He enumerates ten such strategies: 1. Identify the purpose in reading. 2. Use graphemic rules and patterns to aid in bottom-up reading. 3. Use different silent reading techniques for relatively rapid reading. 4. Skim the text for main ideas. 5. Scan the text for specific information. 6. Use semantic mapping or clustering. 7. Guess when you aren't certain. 8. Analyze vocabulary. 9. Distinguish between literal and implied meanings. 10. Capitalize on discourse markers to process relationships. Wright and Brown (2006) investigated the impact of

explicit strategy instruction on students' reading comprehension of Spanish and/or French as a foreign language. The authors concluded that although the results indicated that the participants' awareness of some strategies and their ability to reflect upon their reading did increase," other strategies seemed harder to acquire. They also pointed out that some learners faced difficulties acquiring complex strategies.

### **Different types of comprehension**

Comprehension of language involves not only the understanding of individual words but also active engagement with the content to create a mental representation (Rashid, 2012). Successful comprehension requires coordination of skills at many levels to extract and construct meaning. The level of difficulty associated with comprehension of certain content depends on the complexity of the language used. There are important differences between the language used in everyday conversations and the language used in school (Westby, 2012), where everyday conversations are originally used to achieve daily tasks and share personal information. Academic language includes a different set of words, more complex grammatical structures and different text organization to express content that describes complex relationships (Zwiers, 2008).

### **3. CONCLUSION**

The study aims to explore the need analysis in teaching reading skill. In this context, encouraging needs analysis is significant for higher learning institutes' aspirations to prepare qualified learners equipped with academic and non-academic skills. Moreover, ESP teachers need to have a consistent and clear understanding of needs analysis, partners involved, and the significance of implementing it in their teaching context.

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