

NA (NEED ANALYSIS) AS A FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLE IN ORGANIZING AN ESP (ENGLISH FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES) COURSE

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Annotation: *This article attempts to explain the importance of NA in organizing English language classes for students of non-philological majors.*

Key word: *ESP, needs analysis, syllabus, materials development, learning objectives, authentic materials, evaluation.*

What is ESP?

Since its inception, a number of linguists have tried to define the essence and significance of **English for Specific Purposes**.

Laurence Anthony defines ESP as “an eclectic approach that takes the most useful, successful, and valid ideas from other theories and practices, combining them into a consistent whole [1]”. One of his broad definitions specifies that “ESP is an approach to language teaching that targets the current and /or future academic and occupational *needs* of learners, focuses on the necessary language, genre, and skills to address these needs, and assists learners in meeting these needs through the use of general and/or discipline-specific teaching materials and methods [1]”.

Robinson also tries to emphasize the importance of needs analysis in teaching ESP by providing key criteria that “ESP is normally goal directed, and that ESP courses develop from a *needs analysis* which “aims to specify as closely as possible what exactly it is that students have to do through the medium of English [2]”.

One of the prominent definitions given to ESP belongs to Hutchinson and Waters who see “ESP as an approach rather than a product. ESP is not a particular kind of language or methodology, nor does it consist of a particular type of teaching material. Understood properly, it is an approach to language learning, which is based on *learner need* [6]”.

A definition of ESP by Munby is still considered one of the current definitions given to this approach to language teaching. The definition states that “ESP courses are those where the syllabus and materials are determined in all essentials by the prior analysis of the communication *needs of the learner*” [4]

What are the main principles of ESP?

Anthony Laurence introduces the four principles of the ESP approach: *needs analysis, learning objectives, materials and methods and evaluation* [1]. Alike Anthony Laurence most linguists introduce similar stages of organizing an ESP course.

So what do these stages represent? ‘Needs Analysis’ is the **first stage** when an ESP teacher attempts to conduct research to identify language and professional needs of learners in order to set course objectives. The **second principle** is called ‘Learning Objectives’ which is about analyzing results taken from needs analysis and setting learning objectives for a lesson or for a whole course. This phase can also be referred to as the ‘syllabus designing process’ which is mainly concerned with defining course objectives in a written and approved form. The **third phase** is related to the development of language learning materials in order to master those language and professional skills defined in learning objectives of a syllabus. One of the key characteristics of this stage is the use of ‘authentic materials’ in teaching and the development of specific tasks and activities that reflect the learning objectives of a course. Finally, the **fourth step** is ‘assessment’ which may differ from other language teaching approaches and ‘assessment’ in ESP tends to assess learners’ ‘*performance*’ rather than grammatical and vocabulary competences. ‘Performance’ refers to those language and professional skills that are defined as important to accomplish certain tasks that aim to serve learners’ communication needs in English in a specific area.

Needs Analysis

Now let’s talk more about NA, because this very first step determines the ‘fate’ of the subsequent stages of organizing an ESP course. According to Lindy Woodrow, “Needs analysis is the first step in the course-design cycle in ESP and refers to the systematic analysis of what learners need in order to operate in the target situation”[5]. This definition is one of the simplest explanations showing the main purpose of this activity. Since any ESP course is built on learners’ language and professional needs, identifying these needs requires a lot of effort and attention in order to establish clear objectives of a course. Helen Basturkmen describes the role of an ESP practitioner as follows: “the task of the ESP course developer is to identify the needs of the learner and design a course around it” [3].

So, how is NA done?

In a report by Lee So-mui and Mead (2000) on a needs analysis that they conducted to develop a course for students on the textile and clothing trade, they reported using various types of research methods to collect data, including

questionnaires and survey, telephone interviews, analysis of authentic correspondence (texts) and visit to the workplace. They found that salespeople in the workplace were more likely to use written English than spoken English. Moreover, fax and telephone calls were more common channels of communication than email and letters, and those in which they often use abbreviations in written communication [3]. Examples of NA reports can be found in many scientific articles, and these examples can help ESP practitioners to better understand the nature, purpose and procedure of NA.

Tom Hutchinson and Alan Waters divide NA into three types. They divide NA into learner ‘necessities’, ‘lacks’ and ‘wants’[6]. ‘**Necessities**’ refer to the type of need determined by the demand of the target situation, that is, what the learner has to know in order to function effectively in the target situation. ‘**Lacks**’ are the type of need determined by identifying what the learner knows already, so that an ESP teacher can then decide which of the necessities the learner lacks. ‘**Wants**’ are the type of needs determined by the learners’ view as to what their needs are. Learners may well have a clear idea of the ‘necessities’ of the target situation. These three types of needs can be identified either using the research methods mentioned in Lee So-mui and Mead’s research or in any or other research methods that can help to get data. These three types of needs can be determined either by the research methods mentioned in the studies by Lee Seo-mui and Mead, or by any other research methods that can assist in obtaining data.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we can say that NA is one of the most important principles of ESP and no ESP course can be organized without carrying out this procedure.

LITERATURE

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