
Poster Presentation

Turning Teachers onto ESP: Searching for ESP in What We Already Do

Colin Skeates

Keio University

A needs analysis is one of the three absolute principles that determine whether or not a course can be labelled ESP (Dudley-Evans and St. John, 1998). It essentially determines the what and how of a course (Hyland, 2006). The simple argument being made here is that teachers are already engaged in activities associated with needs analysis, so with a little reflection, perhaps new (possible) directions can be pursued for how courses are designed. Indeed, Hyland (2008, as cited in Basturkmen, 2010; 19) notes that a “[n]eeds analysis is like any other classroom practice in that it involves decisions based on teachers’ interest, values, and beliefs about teaching, learning and language.”

This paper will re-examine the needs analyses conducted with three intensive law ESP courses (total in-class hours = 72 hours), known as Law and Communication 1-3, over a three-year period. This examination has two main parts: in the first, a brief summary of ESP theory is discussed concluding with the role of the needs analysis. In the second part, different needs analyses are explained through the results of common classroom practices: the learning journal, the pre-course questionnaire, the end-of-course evaluation. The author concludes that many teachers already engage in activities that involve some form of needs analysis. It is therefore suggested that re-examining the data may be a helpful way for those new to ESP to start developing their own ESP courses.

The Theory of ESP

In historical reviews, most researchers agree that ESP began as a distinct approach to language learning in the late 1960s to early 1970s. For example, Brunton (2009) begins by referring to a course documented by Ewer and Latorre (1969), who wrote of a course based solely on register analysis. Others, such as Hutchinson and Waters (1987) point to the pivotal role of such researchers as Strevens (1977), and Swales (1971), who refined the theory of ESP further. Such refinement included greater consideration of learners' needs, course methodology, and holistic features of a content area. Dudley-Evans and St. John's (1998), firmly based on Strevens' work, are perhaps the most cited source today for determining what ESP means. Dudley-Evans and St. John's absolute principles with the Law and Communication courses in mind would therefore be:

1. ESP meets specific needs of the Law & Communication course learners;
2. ESP makes use of the methodology and materials activities of law;
3. ESP is centered on the language (e.g. lexicogrammar, register), skills, discourse and genres appropriate to activities associated with law.

Needs Analysis

Needs analysis has become far more complex since the early days of ESP. For example, in a simple comparison of the literature Basturkmen (2010) contrasted the needs analysis of Chamber's (1980) to Dudley-Evans and St. John's (1998). In Chamber's version there is only one category, the situational needs analysis. In Dudley-Evans and St. John's version there are seven categories, each of which contains one or more forms of needs analysis. With new literature written about specific contexts, new forms of needs analysis, or refinement of old ones, are being generated often.

Given this increasingly complicated picture of what a needs analysis can be, it is useful for teachers to understand what the purpose of one is. According to Basturkmen (2010), the needs analysis is essentially a course design tool. It ensures what students learn is what they need for work-based or study-based activity in a foreign language.

To demonstrate the different forms of needs analysis conducted before,

during, and after the Law and Communication courses (hereafter referred to as L&C 1-3), a simple three-part pattern will be used. First, the form (e.g., pre-course questionnaire, course evaluation) in which the data were derived will be discussed. Secondly, the type of needs analysis will be introduced with an explanation of what the specific analysis does. Thirdly, how this analysis helped shaped the direction of the course will be stated.

Table 1 provides an overview of the different ways in which the data were attained for the needs analysis conducted for L&C 1, 2, and 3, between 2012 and 2014. Student needs were derived from a pre-course questionnaire (2012 and 2014)/ + interview (2013 and 2014), a paper-based end-of-course evaluation, and a learning journal.

Pre-course Questionnaire

The questionnaire (Figure 1) was divided into three parts: questions regarding law content knowledge (target situation analysis), skill tasks (skills analysis), and a series of “Can-do” questions regarding speaking in English (present situation analysis/lacks). The pre-course interview tended to cover similar areas as the questionnaire, but with an additional focus on seeking to better understand students’ initial speaking abilities (present situation analysis).

The results of the pre-course questionnaire and interview significantly

Table 1
The Different Forms from Which Data for Each Needs Analysis were Derived

	2012 curriculum	2013 curriculum	2014 curriculum
L&C 1	Pre-course questionnaire, Week one course evaluation	Pre-course interview, Week one course evaluation	Pre-course questionnaire and interview, Week one course evaluation
L&C 2	Week two course evaluation	Week two course evaluation	Week two course evaluation
L&C 3	Week three course evaluation, post-course interview	Week three course evaluation, post-course interview	Week three course evaluation

Content Knowledge:
Without using a dictionary answer the following 6 questions.

1. What does the word law mean? _____

Skills:

1. Read the following paragraphs and underline the most important points. You may use a dictionary

<Reading Text>

What is the passage about? _____

2. Your teacher will play a short passage. Listen and take notes.

Can-Do statements: Answer the following 11 questions about having a discussion.

1. Can you talk about one thing, such as your favourite band or hobby, for:

- 2 minutes? Y / N
- 5 minutes? Y / N
- 10 minutes? Y / N

Figure 1. Examples of each of the sections from the pre-course questionnaire.

altered the pre-conceived ideas the teacher had regarding methodology and course content. Most students were not able to complete all of the content questions. However, almost all students were surprised to learn that they could answer the questions in Japanese or in English with the aid of a dictionary. This target situation analysis (Basturkmen, 2010) indicated that vocabulary learning was necessarily going to be a significant part of the course. It also indicated a possible need for dictionary training.

The results from the skills section clearly demonstrated the diversity of the class. Some students were able to identify the main parts of the reading passage. However the way this was put down on the page was cumbersome; it was their organization of notes, not their comprehension of passage that required further instruction. Other students, especially one student in the 2012 class, however excelled at note-taking/mapping. This indicated opportunities for peer to peer teaching. Interpreting the results of this section led to a greater understanding of what individual students could do, a form of learner factor analysis (Basturkmen,

2010). It also led to a need for skills training to be added because students would need a variety of academic skills when they were to do presentations. The initial realization that skills training would be required and the identification of the skills needed are the results of a skills analysis (Basturkmen, 2010).

The last section of the pre-course questionnaire/interview demonstrated not only the limitations of students' speaking abilities, from an emic perspective, but also how few opportunities students have had to engage in reflection of their speaking. This realization of the different levels of reflection added information about who each of the learners were and their abilities, which is part of a learner factor analysis (Basturkmen, 2010).

End-of-course Evaluation

The second area concerns the end-of-course evaluation. For each main activity/task students were asked to rate whether they found it useful/not useful, easy/difficult, and interesting/boring (Table 2). The ideal is for tasks to receive a high interest score, above average difficulty score, and high usefulness score. To help students remember the activity/task, the day(s) of the week were included. In addition, to supplement the quantitative data, students were asked to write comments when they wanted to explain their answer in more detail. This evaluation of the course enabled the teacher to rank tasks and strategy training, providing an objective analysis (West, 1997) for future course planning, or what Basturkmen (2010) refers to simply as ongoing needs analysis.

Table 2
A Sample Taken from the 2013 L&C 1 Course Evaluation

Activity	Evaluation	Comment
Shadowing M, T, W, Th	Useful *** Not Useful Easy *** Difficult Interesting *** Boring	
Reflection T, W, Th	Useful *** Not Useful Easy *** Difficult Interesting *** Boring	

Note: Adapted from Murphey (2010)

Through this simple format of ranking, it was possible to determine not only which tasks were best for each student, but also for the class as a whole. The addition of comments provided greater understanding of how students felt. This was particularly useful later when meeting with students individually. For example, the speaking fluency task 4-3-2 (Maurice, 1983) has been ranked as the most useful task in all three years. Comments from students suggest that 4-3-2 was the task where they felt the greatest improvement. More law-related tasks tended to be rated as being very difficult, indicating a need to simplify or move them to later in the course.

Learning Journal

The last common classroom practice that will be looked at is the learning journal. At the start of each year, students were asked to write what were their goals. They were also asked to write a new entry each day, by including the date, what they learnt, and how they felt. From time to time, they would be asked specific questions such as how certain tasks were related to what they would be doing in the future.

A seminal paper by Allwright (1984) articulated clearly the assertion that learners have their own learning agendas. One way to understanding what learners want to learn and what they learn is to ask them to keep a learning diary/journal (Bailey, 1991). Though there are several ways to do so, most involve the recording of what was learned and how such learning can be applied in other situations.

With regard to needs analysis, this has obvious implications for those wanting to understand learners' needs better. Asking students to reflect on classroom tasks clearly shows how they are learning the course content, which is a form of learner factor analysis (Basturkmen, 2010). In addition, students setting and assessing their own goals, meant the teacher better understood which strategies needed to be taught. This is a form of strategies analysis (Basturkmen, 2010). Recent ESP research on learner identity by Belcher and Lukkarila (2011) suggests greater attention needs to be paid on how learners see themselves. Utilizing the learning journal is one way teachers can do this.

Final Thoughts

This discussion has been limited to better understanding the needs of students in one particular context using three common classroom activities: the pre-course questionnaire, the end of course evaluation and the learning journal. There were, however, other forms of needs analysis that were necessary to derive the course methodology and materials. For example, the law faculty explicitly stated that the course was to focus on speaking. This area of focused attention was used to help determine which of the four skills would be given priority, a form of objective analysis (West, 1997). A greater understanding of the constraints of the physical teaching environment, (e.g., the lack of technology) was part of the means analysis (West, 1997) conducted when deciding what materials would be used. A third source of needs analysis not discussed above was uncovering what students would be doing in L&C 4-5. Forecasting the activities of these courses meant students would require experience conducting presentations about important historical figures in law in L&C 4 (2012), and engaging in global issues debates in L&C 5. This process was part of the target situation analysis (Basturkmen, 2010).

The purpose of reflecting here on the various sources of information was to demonstrate how these common aspects of the classroom can be used to better understand the needs of learners. This insight can in turn inform methodology. For example, it can inform how material is taught, and what language features and skills should be included. In short, such exploration into the needs of learners can lead teachers to explore the other two absolute principles of an ESP program (Dudley-Evans and St. John, 1998) and why all three principles are useful.

References

- Allwright, D. (1984). Why don't learners learn what teachers teach?-The interaction hypothesis. In D. M. Singleton and D. G. Little (Eds.), *Language learning in formal and informal contexts*. Dublin, Ireland: IRAAL.
- Bailey, K. C. (1991). Diary studies of classroom language learning: The doubting game and the believing game. In E. Sadtono (Ed.), *Language acquisition and the second/foreign language classroom* (Anthology Series 28).

- Retrieved from <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED367166.pdf>
- Basturkmen, H. (2010). *Developing courses for specific purposes*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Belcher, D., & Lukkarila, L. (2011). Identity in the ESP context: Putting the learner front and center in needs analysis. In D. Belcher, A.M. Johns and B. Paltridge (Eds.), *New directions in English for Specific Purposes research* (pp. 73-93). Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press.
- Brunton, M. (2009). An account of ESP – with possible future directions. *English for Specific Purposes*, 3(24), 1-15.
- Dudley-Evans, T., & St John, M. (1998). *Developments in ESP: A multi-disciplinary approach*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.
- Hutchinson, T., & Waters, A. (1987). *English for Specific Purposes*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.
- Hyland, K. (2006). *English for Specific Purposes: An advanced resource book*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Maurice, K. (1983). The fluency workshop. *TESOL Newsletter*, 17(4), 29.
- Murphey, T. (2010) Creating Language Agencing. Plenary. *36th Annual International Conference on Language Teaching and Learning & Educational Materials Expo*, November 19-22, Aichi Industry and Labor Center, Nagoya. Japan Association of Language Teaching.
- West, R. (1997). Need analysis: State of the art. In R. Howard and G. Brown (Eds.), *Teacher education for LSP* (pp. 68-79). Clevedon, England: Multilingual Matters.

Author bio

Colin Skeates is currently the coordinator of the Intensive English Program for the Faculty of Law, Keio University. Over a 20-year period, he has taught English in Thailand, Canada, and Japan. This is his first article reflecting on EAP. skeates@keio.jp

Received: December 7, 2014

Accepted: November 13, 2015