



**Proposing a Procedure for English
Learners' Needs Analysis:
Iraqi Vocational Schools as a Sample**

By

Instructor Dr.. Muayyad Naji Ahmed

Ph.D. Teaching English as a Foreign Language
The Open Educational College
muayyad_naji@yahoo.com

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Abstract

This research proposes a learners' needs analysis procedure that can be adopted before editing English textbooks, specifically for Iraqi vocational schools. The researcher explains the importance, the approaches and the procedures of learners' needs analysis, introduces a procedure that is thought to be practical and explains how it may be designed and/or developed. The main terms and concepts of learners' needs analysis and those related to specific purposes have been defined. A questionnaire has been prepared by the researcher and then approved by experts as a research tool in its English and Arabic versions. Fifty vocational school teachers, supervisors and experts in education and curriculum design have been requested to fill up the questionnaire. The researcher accordingly identifies the results that, he thinks, can be of significant value for both textbooks designers and teachers.

Key words: needs analysis, approaches, procedures, textbooks, syllabus design, vocational schools.

اقتراح إجراء لتحليل حاجات متعلمي اللغة الانكليزية : المدارس المهنية العراقية إنموذجاً

د. مؤيد ناجي احمد

ملخص البحث

يسعى البحث الحالي إلى إقتراح إجراء لتحليل حاجات متعلمي اللغة الانكليزية لغرض الإفادة منها عند تصميم منهج اللغة الانكليزية وبالأخص للمدارس المهنية العراقية. ويوضح الباحث أهمية وطرق وأدوات تحليل الحاجات في ضوء مراجعة الأدبيات والمصادر ذات العلاقة والتي على أساسها تم اقتراح إجراء قد يكون الأنسب عملياً للغرض أعلاه مع بيان كيفية بنائه أو تطويره. وقد تم التعريف بالمصطلحات التي وردت في سياق البحث وكذلك التوسع في شرح المفاهيم المتعلقة بمنهج اللغة الانكليزية للأغراض الخاصة وتحليل حاجات المتعلمين.

تم إعداد استبيان كأداة للبحث وقد شارك خمسون مشرفاً تربوياً ومدرساً وخبيراً بالإجابة عليه، ثم تم تحليل البيانات واستنتاج الصيغة المثالية للإجراء المقترح والتي يعتقد الباحث بأنها قد تكون ذا أهمية لمصممي المنهج الدراسي وكذلك للمدرسين.

الكلمات الافتتاحية: تحليل الحاجات ، الأساليب ، الإجراءات ، الكتب المدرسية ، تصميم المنهج ، المدارس المهنية

Section One

Introduction

English textbooks for Iraqi vocational schools have passed through successive developing efforts on the basis of stabilizing general aims, specific objectives and editing textbooks accordingly but without a documented attempt to identify learners' needs.

The researcher has carried out this research to bridge this gap by proposing a procedure of analyzing those needs.

Definition of Needs Analysis:

"Needs analysis is the process of determining the needs for which a learner or group of learners requires a language and arranging those needs according to priorities. The analysts gather information about the learner in order to know the objectives for which the language is needed, the situation in which the language will be used, the community with whom the language will be used and the targeted level of proficiency." (Richards, et al. 1992: 242-3)

Nunan (1988: 13) has also enclosed this analysis with the techniques and procedures of collecting information to be used in syllabus design.

When we trace the historical background of needs analysis, we can notice its appearance in language planning during the 1970s. "Needs analysis became widespread in language teaching as the initial process for the specification of learning outcomes which then explored different syllabus elements such as functions which refer to using the language to maintain relationships with people, notions which refer to arranging the language content according to the meaning the learner needs to express and lexis which means organizing the syllabus in terms of the most important, frequent or useful vocabulary terms in a language." (Richards and Schmidt, 2002: 217)

The researcher summarizes the approaches and the importance of learners' needs analysis to syllabus design, identifies the practical tools of needs analysis, draws out conclusions and proposes a tool for English learners' needs analysis in Iraqi vocational schools.

The Problem

Iraqi vocational schools had witnessed editing new English teaching syllabuses and textbooks after 2003 for all specific purposes; industry, agriculture, applied arts, tourism and commerce, but none of these textbooks' contents choice was based on scientific learners' needs analysis procedures.

The Aim

This research aims to propose a learners' needs analysis procedure that can be adopted before editing English textbooks for Iraqi vocational schools in order to bridge the gap in the process of curriculum design.

The Hypothesis

The researcher hypothesizes that teachers, supervisors, experts in textbook design can work together for identifying learners' needs analysis in such a way that can be considered as guidelines for textbook design.

The Procedures

- Identifying the needs analysis approaches and procedures and then choosing the workable procedure that suits the Iraqi situation.
- Designing a questionnaire as the most suitable procedure.
- Submitting the questionnaire to a sample of experts, supervisors, teachers and curriculum consultants in order to get their responses and further suggestions.
- Recommending the final version of needs analysis procedure that can be used before designing English courses for Iraqi vocational schools.

Section Two

Approaches to Learners' Needs Analysis

This section reviews the approaches to learners' needs analysis and shapes the proposed procedure with a theoretical and logical background.

2.1 The Sociolinguistic Approach

Munby (1978) suggests an approach which focuses on the aspects of communication (linguistic / phonetic elements) and roles of language, learners, syllabus designers and teachers in identifying the purpose, channels of communication (spoken and/or written), sociolinguistic aspects denoting the communication roles found within situations (Crystal, 2003: 422), linguistics (the scientific presentation of language) and pragmatics as knowledge and procedures which enable learners to understand each other's words. (Cook, 2003: 51)

Munby's vision on individual learner needs can be summarized in two stages;

- a. The communication needs processor of eight variables arranged as parameters of communication needs. This processor is operated by inserting inputs such as foreign language, learner, identity and language information, purpose (possible inputs), context, environment, interaction behavior,

instrumentality, business language (dialect), target level of proficiency, communicative event (tasks and duties), and the communicative key (specific topics, words and phrases).

b. Interpreting the needs profile that is derived from the processor into skills (grammar, vocabulary, questions and answers) (Richards and Rodgers, 2001: 2001-105) and functions (role playing and innovative language constructions). It is the communicative key which determines which way of processing is appropriate; focusing on skills, on functions or on linguistic forms. (Crystal, 2003: 183)

This approach is considered a sociolinguistic model that "can be used to specify valid target situations (Jordan, 1997; West, 1994) (as cited in Kaewpet, 2009: 210) that target participative, interactional and academic communicative competence (Tikunoff, 1983 in Richards, 1990: 41).

To sum up, this approach requires presenting a profile of communication needs, comprising communicative events, the purposive domain (e.g., educational), medium (e.g., spoken), mode (e.g., dialogue), channel (e.g., face-to-face), main communicators, subject content. After a profile has been created, the communicative needs are developed into a syllabus.

2.2 The Systematic Approach

Richterich and Chanceral proposed this approach in 1977 to identify the needs of adults learning a foreign language and to fill the gap in the sociolinguistic approach in terms of flexibility with a distinct concern for learners. Learner needs are investigated before a course starts as well as during the course by both the learners and the teachers. (Jordan, 1997 as cited in Kaewpet, 2009: 210)

Hutchinson and Waters recommend that language syllabus designers should take into account the following considerations; familiar teaching/learning styles, effective teaching methods, knowledge of specialized contents that teachers should have, suitable instructional materials and study environment, and sufficient units of study.

It is worth concluding that this approach relies on systematic analysis of spatial and temporal data about learners' needs.

2.3 The Learning-centered Approach

Hutchinson and Waters (1987: 54) argue that " more attention should be given to how learners learn and they suggest that a learning needs approach is the best route to convey learners from the starting point to the target situation. Learner needs are approached from two directions; target needs and learning needs."

Target needs, on one hand, represent what the learners need to do in the target situation and they are broken into three categories; necessities, lacks and wants.

'Necessities' are what the learner has to know in order to function effectively in the target situation (ibid: 55), 'lacks' are the gaps between what the learner knows and the necessities (ibid: 56), whereas 'wants' are what the learners think they need. (Nation, 2000: 2)

The second focus, on the other hand, is on learning needs addressing what the learners need to do in order to learn with reference to their socio-cultural and learning background, age, gender, attitudes towards studying English and the English-speaking community, and knowledge of specialized contents.

It can be realized that this approach addresses the factors that coincide with the learning process without which an effective course, the researcher believes, would no longer exist.

2.4 The Learner-centered Approach

In this approach, Berwick (1989: 55) offers three ways to look at learner needs. Firstly, perceived needs that are recommended by experts versus felt needs as perceived by learners,

Secondly, product-oriented interpretation which refers to the language that learners require in target situation versus process-oriented interpretation where the focus on how individuals respond to their language situation,

Thirdly, objective needs that are explored by course designers prior to a course versus subjective needs that are addressed while the course is underway as perceived by the learners.

It can be noticed that this approach highlights learners' attitudes and feelings and addresses factors such as personality, confidence and learning strategies.

2.5 The Task-based Approach

Long (2005: 3) recommends adopting a task-based approach and argues that "structures and other linguistic elements (notions, functions, etc.) should not be a focal point of teaching and learning. Learners are far from active and cognitive-independent participants in the acquisition process than is assumed by the belief that what you teach is what they learn, and when you teach it is when they learn."

In this approach, the tasks are the units of analysis and the samples of the discourse typically involved in the performance of those tasks are collected.

A Concluding Remark

A practical need analysis approach aids textbook designers and teachers to develop materials, skills, assessment, teaching approaches and training. Secondly, it assures flexible rather than fixed curriculum and, finally, it provides information to the learner about what to prepare for the course, what he has achieved and what he needs to do next.

Section Three

Needs Analysis Procedures

This section introduces needs analysis procedures in general, the specific procedure adopted by the researcher as a tool of the research and the finally proposed procedure.

3.1 Procedures

Since "needs analysis is a family of procedures for gathering information about learners and about communication skills" (Nunan, 1988: 75), it is necessary, as Brown (1995: 36) confirms, to identify the procedures or tools that can be used to collect and analyze information and then to validate a defensible syllabus that satisfies the language learning requirements of students for a particular institution.

Among the types of needs analysis tools, activities and or procedures, what might be practical includes;

1. Survey Questionnaires

"A questionnaire is a set of questions on a topic designed to be answered by a respondent." (Richards and Schmidt, 2002: 438). Many types of questionnaires have been designed to determine learners' needs. They consist of a list of topics, skills or language uses and the learners show what they already know or want to know by checking in the appropriate column or box, or they may be asked to use a scale to rank the value of each item. (Dudley-Evans and John, 1998: 133)

2. Interviews

"An interview is a conversation between an investigator and an individual or a group of individuals in order to gather information for linguistic analysis and in needs analysis (Richards and Schmidt, 2002: 271). Interviews with learners, either individually or in groups, provide information only about what they know, what their goals are, and how they intend to use the language.

3. Reading / Writing Materials Review

The teacher can spread out newspapers, magazines, greeting cards and books and asks the students which they would like to work on in class. A similar activity can be done with different types of writing.

4. Class Discussion

By showing images of persons in different contexts, "the analyst can ask 'What skills do you want to develop?' and then have the learners generate a list. 'Why do you want to develop language skills?'. Learners might be more willing to express their desires if they move from the impersonal to the personal in this way." (Auerbach, 1994 as cited in Kaewpet, 2009: 212)

It is worth focusing on Brown's (1995: 43-5) questions that might be included in any analysis tool under the following parameters; abilities (learner's current competence), problems (existing difficulties and lack in performance, attitudes (feeling towards a language element), priority

(ranking element importance) and solutions (changes that might bring about improvements).

The researcher ends up with the certainty that the questionnaire is the most applicable and suitable procedure of learners' needs analysis for the Iraqi situation.

3.2 The Tool of this Research

The researcher designs a three-part questionnaire with indicators of topics, language elements and skills. The first part consists of twenty-one topics to identify the usefulness of each topic. The second part presents eight language skills and elements to rate their importance and priority. The third part includes the resources out of which the language content might be taken. The respondents are to state both the importance and priority of each item.

The questionnaire will be submitted to experts, supervisors and teachers but not the students for the following reasons given by (Basturkmen, 2006 as cited in [www. Slideshare.net](http://www.Slideshare.net)). "Learners may lack linguistic awareness, objective needs are not the same as subjective needs, language use is too unpredictable, and needs analysis often serves the institution rather than the learners."

3.3 The Questionnaire

Below is the questionnaire that has been used by the researcher in order to identify English language learners in Iraqi vocational school.

Research title: Proposing a Procedure for English Learners' Needs Analysis: Iraqi Vocational Schools as a Sample

Dear colleagues,

The researcher proposes a procedure of the questionnaire type to analyze English language learners' needs in Iraqi vocational schools. The questionnaire falls into three parts; part one determines the usefulness of the suggested topics and the priority of each topic to be dealt with when designing an English course, part two indicates which language skill is most important and thus should be given priority whereas part three requires selecting the resources for language content for the basic four language skills.

Your participation will help the researcher conclude the final form of the proposed procedure.

Thank you for your time and cooperation.

Part One: Topics usefulness and priority

Please state the usefulness of each of the following topics in the English course for Iraqi vocational schools and their priority. You can add other topics.

No.	Topic	Not useful	Useful	Priority (from 1 to 24)
1	Electricity			
2	Engineering materials and properties			
3	Shapes and dimensions			
4	Oil production			
5	Numbers and quantities			
6	Devices and equipment			
7	Processes and procedures			
8	Hand works			
9	Buildings and constructions			
10	Safety at work			
11	Dairy products			
12	Advices and instructions			
13	Travelling and tourism			
14	Finance and accounting			
15	Purchase orders and invoice letters			
16	Future predictions and technical innovations			
17	Marketing			
18	Pottery			
19	Insurance			
20	Career opportunities			
21	Cattle and poultry breeding			
22	Mechanics			
23	Engines			
24	Drawing and designing			

It is worth noting here that the researcher has chosen (24) topics as there are (3) years of study in Iraqi vocational schools. The textbook assigned for each year can include (8) topics as officially recommended.

Part Two: Language skill importance and priority

Please state the importance and priority of each skill. You can add other skills.

No.	Skill	Not important	Important	Priority (from 1 to 9)
1	Listening			
2	Speaking			
3	Pronunciation			
4	Reading			
5	Writing			
6	Functions			
7	Specific Vocabulary			
8	General Vocabulary			
9	Grammar			

Part Three: Language content resources for each skill:

Please state the importance of each of the following language content resource and their priority. You can add other resources.

A. Reading

No.	Resources	Not important	Important	Priority (from 1 to7)
1	Manuals			
2	Instructions			
3	Contracts			
4	Product specifications			
5	Price lists			
6	Legal documents			
7	General topics			

B. Listening

No.	Resources	Not important	Important	Priority (from 1 to 6)
1	Lectures			
2	Instructions			
3	Presentations			
4	Reports			
5	Explanations given by teacher			
6	Teacher talks			

C. Speaking

No.	Resources	Not important	Important	Priority (from 1 to 5)
1	Speaking to foreigners			
2	Speaking on the phone			
3	Taking part in discussions			
4	Giving instructions			
5	General small talks			

D. Writing

No.	Resources	Not important	Important	Priority (from 1 to 6)
1	Business letters			
2	E-mails			
3	Notes			
4	Summaries			
5	Glossary			
6	Translation			

The questionnaire has been shown to jury members of experts and educational specialists and has got face validity and has been modified into its last version.

Section Four**Results and Conclusions****4.1 The Results of the Research**

Fifty vocational school teachers, supervisors and curriculum consultant have sent their responses identifying English learners' needs in Iraqi vocational schools as statistically **shown below**:

Part One: Topics usefulness and priority:

The levels of priority, the calculated arithmetic means and the percentages of the suggested topics are shown in Table (1A) below.

Table 1A: Topics Priority Analysis

No.	Topic	Level of Priority			Arithmetic Mean	Percentage
		High	Medium	Low		
1	Electricity	7.00	13.00	10.00	1.90	63.33
2	Engineering materials and properties	9.00	15.00	6.00	2.10	70.00
3	Shapes and dimensions	5.00	11.00	14.00	1.70	56.67
4	Oil production	9.00	8.00	13.00	1.87	62.22
5	Numbers and quantities	9.00	10.00	11.00	1.93	64.44
6	Devices and equipment	12.00	8.00	10.00	2.07	68.89
7	Processes and procedures	11.00	10.00	9.00	2.07	68.89
8	Hand works	8.00	8.00	14.00	1.80	60.00
9	Buildings and constructions	16.00	6.00	8.00	2.27	75.56
10	Safety at work	15.00	8.00	7.00	2.27	75.56
11	Dairy products	15.00	8.00	7.00	2.27	75.56
12	Advices and instructions	7.00	15.00	8.00	1.97	65.56
13	Travelling and tourism	19.00	5.00	6.00	2.43	81.11
14	Finance and accounting	5.00	17.00	8.00	1.90	63.33
15	Purchase orders and invoice letters	5.00	17.00	8.00	1.90	63.33
16	Future predictions and technical innovations	14.00	8.00	8.00	2.20	73.33
17	Marketing	8.00	17.00	5.00	2.10	70.00
18	Pottery	11.00	10.00	9.00	2.07	68.89
19	Insurance	8.00	10.00	12.00	1.87	62.22
20	Career opportunities	10.00	10.00	10.00	2.00	66.67
21	Cattle and poultry breeding	9.00	11.00	10.00	1.97	65.56
22	Mechanics	11.00	14.00	5.00	2.20	73.33
23	Engines	16.00	12.00	2.00	2.47	82.22
24	Drawing and designing	17.00	5.00	8.00	2.30	76.67

It has been found out that the topics are recommended to be dealt with according to their priority as arranged in the following table (1B).

Table 1B: Topics Priority Results

Level of Priority	Topic
1	Engines
2	Travelling and tourism
3	Drawing and designing
4	Buildings and constructions
5	Safety at work
6	Dairy products
7	Future predictions and technical innovations

8	Mechanics
9	Engineering materials and properties
10	Marketing
11	Devices and equipment
12	Processes and procedures
13	Pottery
14	Career opportunities
15	Advices and instructions
16	Cattle and poultry breeding
17	Numbers and quantities
18	Electricity
19	Finance and accounting
20	Purchase orders and invoice letters
21	Oil production
22	Insurance
23	Hand works
24	Shapes and dimensions

Part Two: Language skill and element importance and priority:

The importance of each of the nine language skills and elements are calculated in Table (2A) below.

Table 2A: Analysis of the importance and priority of language skills and elements

No.	Topic	Level of Priority			Arithmetic Mean	Percentage
		High	Medium	Low		
1	Listening	18.00	2.00	10.00	2.27	75.56
2	Speaking	21.00	5.00	4.00	2.57	85.56
3	Pronunciation	17.00	9.00	4.00	2.43	81.11
4	Reading	10.00	10.00	10.00	2.00	66.67
5	Writing	21.00	5.00	4.00	2.57	85.56
6	Language functions	17.00	6.00	7.00	2.33	77.78
7	Specific vocabulary	8.00	11.00	11.00	1.90	63.33
8	General vocabulary	13.00	9.00	8.00	2.17	72.22
9	Grammar	10.00	10.00	10.00	2.00	66.67

It can be concluded that the importance and priority of each language skill and element is as shown in Table (2B) below.

Table 2B: Recommended language skills and elements

Level of Importance	Language Skill and Element
1	Speaking
2	Writing
3	Pronunciation
4	Language functions
5	Listening
6	General vocabulary
7	Reading
8	Grammar
9	Specific vocabulary

The researcher suggests that those nine language skills and elements can be integrated within the topics of study through practicing the given material.

Part Three: Language content resources for each skill:

For this part of the questionnaire, the calculated priority, the mean and the percentage of resources for each skill are shown in the tables below.

A. Reading

Table 3: Reading resources priority analysis

No.	Resources	Level of Priority			Arithmetic Mean	Percentage
		High	Medium	Low		
1	Manuals	12.00	11.00	7.00	2.17	72.22
2	Instructions	14.00	9.00	7.00	2.23	74.44
3	Contracts	10.00	11.00	9.00	2.03	67.78
4	Product specifications	13.00	11.00	6.00	2.23	74.44
5	Price lists	5.00	17.00	8.00	1.90	63.33
6	Legal documents	14.00	8.00	8.00	2.20	73.33
7	General topics	8.00	17.00	5.00	2.10	70.00

It is thus recommended that textbook designers can rely on those resources for the reading skill when editing the course on the basis of the following priority.

Table 3A: Resources for developing the reading skill

No.	Recommended Resources for the Reading Skill
1	Instructions
2	Product specifications
3	Legal documents
4	Manuals
5	General topics
6	Contracts
7	Price lists

B. Listening

Table 4: Listening resources priority analysis

No.	Resources	Level of Priority			Arithmetic Mean	Percentage
		High	Medium	Low		
1	Lectures	13.00	9.00	8.00	2.17	72.22
2	Instructions	10.00	10.00	10.00	2.00	66.67
3	Presentations	9.00	15.00	6.00	2.10	70.00
4	Reports	5.00	11.00	14.00	1.70	56.67
5	Explanations given by teacher	9.00	8.00	13.00	1.87	62.22
6	Teacher talks	7.00	13.00	10.00	1.90	63.33

For developing the listening skill, the following list identifies the priority of each source.

Table 4A: Resources for developing the listening skill

No.	Recommended Resources for the Listening Skill
1	Lectures
2	Presentations
3	Instructions
4	Teacher talks
5	Explanations given by teacher
6	Reports

C. Speaking

Table 5: Speaking resources priority analysis

No.	Resources	Level of Priority			Arithmetic Mean	Percentage
		High	Medium	Low		
1	Speaking to foreigners	9.00	15.00	6.00	2.10	70.00
2	Speaking on the phone	8.00	10.00	12.00	1.87	62.22
3	Taking part in discussions	10.00	10.00	10.00	2.00	66.67
4	Giving instructions	5.00	11.00	14.00	1.70	56.67
5	General small talks	9.00	8.00	13.00	1.87	62.22

Thus, the speaking skill can be developed by engaging learners in the following situations.

Table 5A: Resources for developing the speaking skill

No.	Recommended Resources for the Speaking Skill
1	Speaking to foreigners
2	Taking part in discussions
3	Speaking on the phone
4	General small talks
5	Giving instructions

D. Writing

Table 6: Writing resources priority analysis

No.	Resources	Level of Priority			Arithmetic Mean	Percentage
		High	Medium	Low		
1	Business letters	10.00	10.00	10.00	2.00	66.67
2	E-mails	9.00	9.00	12.00	1.90	63.33
3	Notes	10.00	9.00	11.00	1.97	65.56
4	Summaries	2.00	10.00	18.00	1.47	48.89
5	Glossary	13.00	11.00	6.00	2.23	74.44
6	Translation	5.00	17.00	8.00	1.90	63.33

The writing skill should be exposed by presenting of the following resources.

Table 6A: Resources for developing the writing skill

No.	Recommended Resources for the Writing Skill
1	Glossary
2	Business letters
3	Notes
4	E-mails
5	Translation
6	Summaries

Conclusions

It is concluded that the following chart of book map and resources can be taken into consideration when designing English textbooks content for vocational schools.

No .	Topics	Language skills & elements	Resources for each language skill			
			Reading	Listening	Speaking	Writing
1	Engines	Speaking	Instructions	Lectures	Speaking to foreigners	Glossary
2	Travelling and tourism	Writing	Product specifications	Presentation	Taking part in discussions	Business letters
3	Drawing and designing	Pronunciation	Legal documents	Instructions	Speaking on the phone	Notes
4	Buildings and constructions	Language functions	Manuals	Teacher talks	General small talks	E-mails
5	Safety at	Listening	General	Explanation	Giving	Translatio

	work		topics	s given by teacher	instructions	n
6	Dairy products	General vocabulary	Contracts	Reports		Summaries
7	Future predictions and technical innovations	Reading	Price lists			
8	Mechanics	Grammar				
9	Engineering materials and properties	Specific vocabulary				
10	Marketing					
11	Devices and equipment					
12	Processes and procedures					
13	Pottery					
14	Career opportunities					
15	Advices and instructions					
16	Cattle and poultry breeding					
17	Numbers and quantities					
18	Electricity					
19	Finance and accounting					

20	Purchase orders and invoice letters					
21	Oil production					
22	Insurance					
23	Hand works					
24	Shapes and dimensions					

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