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Needs Analysis and Evaluation in ESP

The key stages in ESP are needs analysis, course design, materials selection, teaching and learning, and evaluation. These are not separate, linearly-related activities, rather they represent phases which overlap and are interdependent. Needs analysis is the process of establishing the *what* and *how* of a course; evaluation is the process of establishing the effectiveness. Neither of these activities are one-off activities – they both need to be on-going.

Needs analysis is neither unique to language teaching nor within language training. However, needs analysis is the corner stone of ESP and leads to a very focused course. What do we understand by the concept of needs and needs analysis? A confusing bunch of terms exists: needs are described as objective and subjective (2:65), perceived and felt (1:55), target situation/goal oriented and learning, process-oriented and product-oriented (2:63); in addition, there are necessities, wants and lacks (5:55). These terms have been introduced to describe the different factors and perspectives which have helped the concept of needs to grow. Each of these terms represents a different philosophy or educational value.

Needs analysis in ESP now encompasses the following:

- A. professional information about the learners: the tasks and activities learners are/will be using English for – *target situation analysis* and *objective needs*;
- B. personal information about the learners: factors which may affect the way they learn such as previous learning experiences, cultural information, reasons for attending the course and expectations of it, attitude to English – *wants, means, subjective needs*;
- C. English language information about the learners: what their current skills and language use are – *present situation analysis* – which allows to assess (D);
- D. the learners' lacks: the gap between (C) and (A) – *lacks*;
- E. language learning information: effective ways of learning the skills and language in (D) – *learning needs*;

F. professional communication information about (A): knowledge of how language and skills are used in the target situation – *linguistic analysis, discourse analysis, genre analysis*;

G. what is wanted from the course;

H. information about the environment in which the course will be run – *means analysis* (3:125).

To establish a workable course design, means analysis is suggested (4:133) as an adjunct to needs analysis. Means analysis looks at the environment in which a course will be run or in the other words, the environment in which a project will take root, grow healthily and survive.

There are many definitions of evaluation; fundamentally evaluation is asking questions and acting on the responses. We accept the following: evaluation is a whole process which begins with determining what information to gather and ends with bringing about change in current activities or influencing future ones. Evaluation must be more than collecting and analyzing data: to have value the evaluation process must include action.

Evaluation is usually described as *formative* or *summative*. Formative evaluation which takes place during the lifetime of an activity and the findings help to shape the course during its life-time. Formative evaluation is typically undertaken at intervals and will consist of a series of “mini-evaluations”. Summative evaluation takes place at the end of an activity and so does not influence that version of the activity. Its purpose is to assess impact and to provide information that can be fed into repeat versions or related activities. Summative evaluation is valuable for durable courses.

Evaluation can be both *qualitative* and *quantitative*. Tests and objective-question questionnaires provide numbers and percentages for individual items. They provide answers to what questions but cannot easily address the how or why. More qualitative methods such as discussions and interviews cover a wider picture, but may be less comparable.

Evaluation can be very threatening; it suggests change and change is often resisted. At the same time evaluation is very constructive and powerful activity and a very stimulating one. There is the chance to focus on what has been going well and to ask what have been the most significant contributing factors so that less successful aspects can be modified. Evaluation can also show weaknesses or features that were just not suitable for the particular group of learners. Evaluation should not be used only negatively to comment on problems. A good evaluation emphasizes the success and discusses less successful aspects. It also addresses the crucial how and why issues. Knowing how well something has worked is not significant on its own. Understanding why will enable us to repeat success and avoid the less successful.

Evaluation in ESP situations is concerned with the effectiveness and efficiency of learning; with achieving the objectives. To be an integral part of a course, evaluation has to be built in as a part of the course design. To evaluate everything is impossible; priorities can be set, the type and timing of data collection can be planned together with the resulting actions. At different times evaluation might focus on the materials used, the classroom activities, the out-of-class support, the course design, methodologies, and the role of assessment, that is any aspect of the teaching-learning situation.

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