# NEEDS ANALYSIS - DEFINING AIMS AND OBJECTIVES WITH REGARD ON STUDENT'S FEEDBACK

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**Abstract.** In contemporary teaching, planning should be more student-centered. Prior to designing syllabuses (especially in institutions where the teacher is free to make decisions independently), students' needs should be taken into account. *What is needs analysis?* Needs analysis is a process of collecting and analyzing information about learners in order to set goals and contents of a language curriculum based on their needs (Kayi, 2008). It examines what learners already know and what they need to know (Nation & Macalister, 2010). Many scholars indicate that knowing about learners' needs such as "their learning objectives, language attitudes, expectations from the course" are necessary in order to design an efficient curriculum (Brindley, 1984; Nunn, 1988, Xenodohids, 2002, et Kayi, 2008). Asking learners for suggestions and advice stimulates the act of learning and students' overall performance. The paper will, therefore, introduce needs analysis in a case study conducted at IBU with students of the ELT department. It will provide general hypothesis, research questions and applied questionnaire, overall conclusions, feedback and further implications.

**Keywords:** needs analysis, aims and objectives, checklist items, decisions

## 1. AN INTRODUCTION TO NEEDS ANALYSIS

*In language teaching, our methods and techniques have often failed to produce effective learning, however sound they may have appeared in theory. To discover why, we must study the learner. William Littlewood,* (1984, pg. 1)

It is known worldwide that English teachers follow a procedure of events i.e. of planning and pre-planning, of thinking, observing and assuming. Accordingly, needs analysis is the preliminary stage of designing courses, syllabuses, materials and the sort of educational activities that take place (Jordan, 1997). It represents all the types of questions teachers ask themselves before actually deciding on what to teach and how to teach the certain course. Therefore, needs analysis is the base on which curriculum content, teaching materials and methods are constructed. This gives way to enhancing the students' motivation and achievement as a result (Otilia, 2015).

To sum up, needs analysis is the systematic data collection and examination of all subjective and objective information required to describe and validate curriculum goals that support the language learning needs of learners within the context of the institutions that affect the learning and teaching situation (Brown, 2006). As Hadaway, Vardell, and Young (2002) state: "English learners bring special needs to the language acquisition process that are different from- or at least more pronounced than- those of native English speakers. These include four critical differences: a lack of command of English vocabulary, a lack of proficiency in English text structure, a lack of appropriate content background, and a lack of knowledge of American culture." (p. 31) As a result, every task taken by the teacher should be based upon a certain assumption or hypothesis; upon students' suggestions, ideas and needs. Teachers should consider "who the

learners are, why they are there, what they need the course for etc…?" Needs analysis, therefore is a process of collecting and analyzing information about learners in order to set goals and contents of a language curriculum based on their needs (Kayi, 2008) and should, therefore, be evaluated and applied in every course of teaching. When applying needs analysis, teachers should consider aims and objectives and re-formulate them accordingly to what learners need the course for. Even though this may sound or appear to someone as an ESP course at university, we believe that every course taught can be based on both teachers and learners' assumptions, interests and beliefs.

How can teachers implement needs analysis? For starters, teachers can ask students to provide suggestions as to what they would like to learn and why and make a list of these suggestions; they could also provide checklist items of content materials; conduct interviews, carry out observations etc. Consequently, students are more active in the learning process; they contribute in decisions and succeed in their goals. Teachers should assist learners in making their learning more meaningful by assuring that they know the importance that the course has in making them fluent speakers for example, or the role that the specific course has in developing them into future English teachers etc. In conclusion, teaching and learning are truly a two-way process: we teach but we also learn, we give but we also take in knowledge and we provide support but also request the same from our learners. The whole teaching/ learning process is fully maintained when both parts are engaged equally.

## 2. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The study was conducted during the previous semester (Fall 2016) at International Balkan University, with third-year students of the English Language Teaching Department. Its' aim was to determine the following:
- ▶ To determine whether the materials and approach used were effective;
- ▶ To determine whether students were aware of the importance of planning lessons in their near future;
- ▶ To establish the teacher-student relationship in providing space for suggestions and ideas;
- ▶ To gain overall feedback regarding motivation and overall teaching methodology. (time management, approach, activities and tasks used etc.)

## 3. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The course which was the central idea of the research is entitled Program development (which is a synonym for Lesson planning). Program development as a course is very important for ELT future teachers due to the emphasis it places on planning i.e. the elements of planning, considerations, time management, aims and objectives, assessment, feedback etc. It is a course matter which requires students to put in additional thought prior, during and after planning and requires for students to focus on many details. The study attempted to check learners' awareness regarding the importance of the course matter, to check for overall comments and suggestions and normally for any needed changes. It also aimed at gathering suggestions regarding content materials, manner of lecturing, suggestions for further improvement etc.

## 4. METHODOLOGY

### 4.1 Participants

The participants in the study were a total of 25, of both genders, with ages between 20-23. Participants were third-year students of the English teaching department, who normally needed the course for mastering important points of planning due to required Internship in the upcoming semester. Accordingly, the course matter is one that links together ELT methodology and approaches, both in theory and practice and the implementation of all elements in an actual classroom setting. The process, therefore, undergoes the phase

of acquaintance, planning and implementation and serves as an indicator of how well these elements are blended in the process.

## 4.2 Study Instruments

The study instrument used was a needs analysis survey, with a total of 8 questions. The questions provided were open-ended questions which intended to provide students with the opportunity to respond as they felt about the issue, without interference what so ever. Their main aim was to collect feedback regarding all the above-mentioned issues and also the manner of teaching, the methods and approaches used and their effectiveness in the process.

## 4.3 Research questions and hypotheses

The study attempts to answer the following questions and fulfill the given hypothesis:
Q1. Is the material and approach effective for the course?
Q2. Do students understand the importance of the course matter?
Q3. What are the needed changes (if any)?

## 4.4 Hypotheses

H1. The more aware the learners are of planning importance, the better results they achieve.
H2.  Defining aims and objectives of a plan (especially at the beginning) are the hardest to define.
H3.  Requiring student feedback stimulates higher motivation and overall success.

## Overall description of obtained results (Data Analysis)
The following results were obtained:
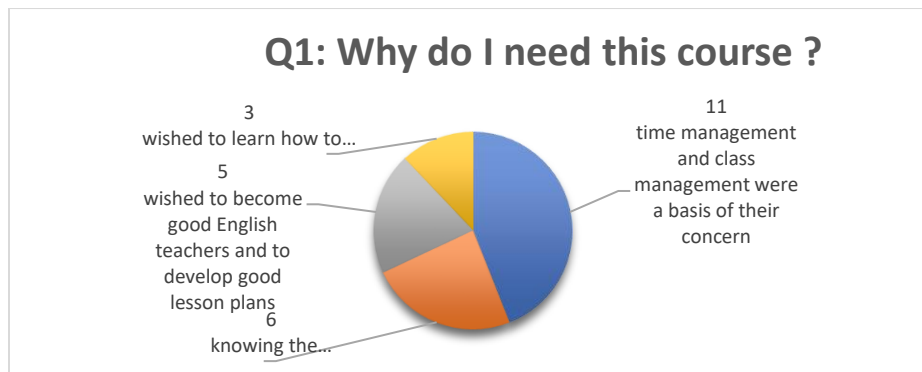


Regarding Q1, " Why do I need this course (list 3 reasons), even though it required different student perspectives, gave an overall of general responses: most replies (10) out of 25, stated that time management and class management were a basis of their concern, 4 out of 25 stated that a reason was knowing the importance of planning and how to plan effectively, 3 students replied that they wished to become good English teachers and that they wished to develop good lesson plans, 3 students replied that they wished to be successful in the near future and that this course was very important for them, 3 students replied that they wished to obtain skills for planning good activities and 2 students replied that they wished to learn how to better know their learners and that they believed that this was a priority when planning.
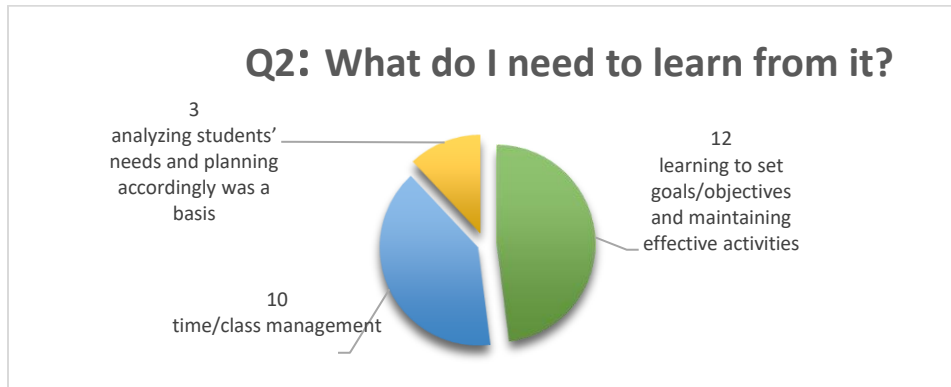
Regarding Q2., " What do I need to learn from it?" (list 3 things) was a closer perspective towards the specific i.e. students were allowed to freely list what their individual perspective was based on the course. The results were as follows: 3 students replied that analyzing students needs and planning accordingly was a basis, 1 student referred to distinguishing aims and objectives as an issue, 1 student wished to know the learners better, 7 students agreed upon learning to set goals/objectives and maintaining effective activities, 3 students referred to organizing class, 2 students referred to effective planning, 5 students referred to time/class management, 2 students referred to teaching and checking for understanding and 1 student referred to the DO's and DONT'S when planning.
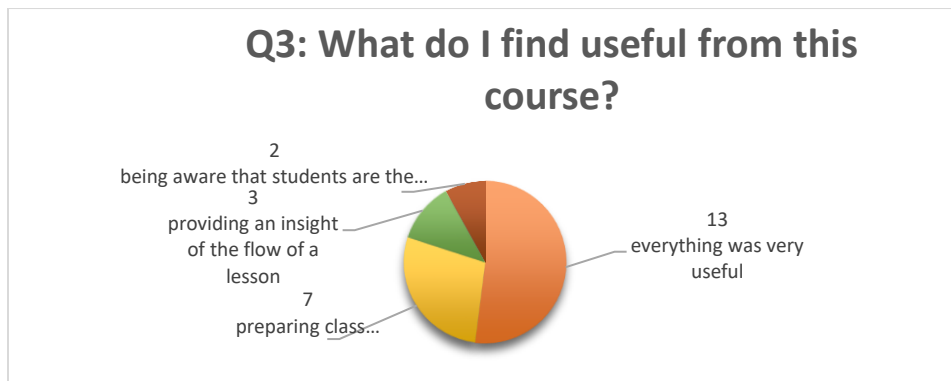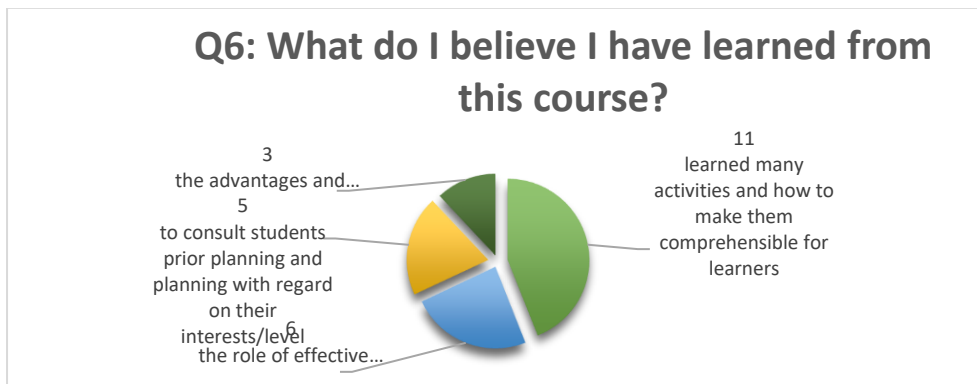


Regarding Q3., "What do I find useful from this course?", 1 student replied that techniques of creating and applying was useful, 9 students replied that all was very useful, 5 students found preparing class activities and applying them very useful, 2 students found learning methods of making plans very helpful and useful, 4 students agreed that the usefulness of the course was in providing an insight of the flow of a lesson, 2 students replied that being aware that students are the center of planning was very important, 1 student replied that the course has helped on self-reflection of weak points and the areas needed for improvement, and lastly, 1 student had not thought of this issue (the usefulness of the course).

## Q4: What don't I find useful?

1
did not approve of too…
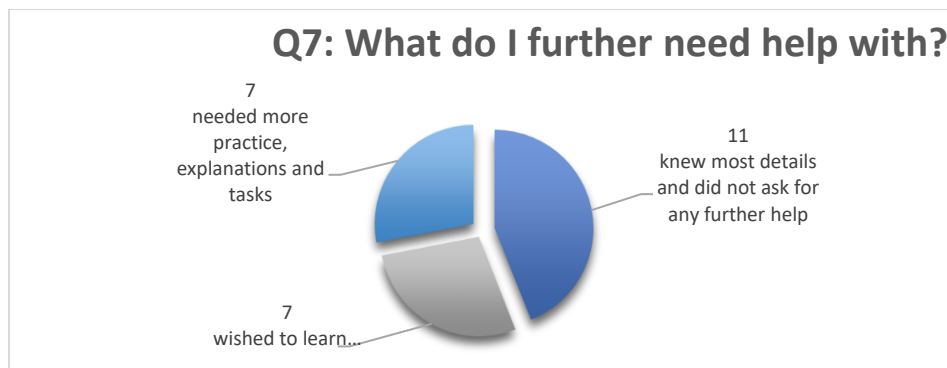
24
everything was very
useful
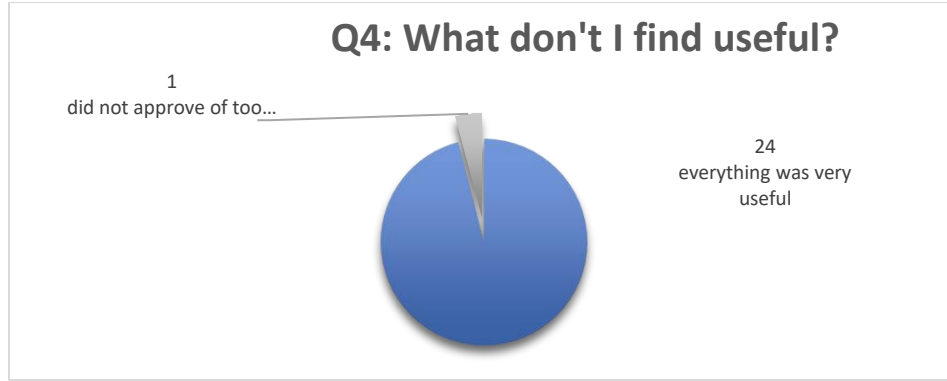
Regarding Q4. "What don't I find useful?" 24 out of 25 replied that everything was very useful especially for their future careers in English teaching, and 1 student did not approve of too many activities in the class. (finding them exhausting)

Regarding Q5., "What I think needs change?"  (i.e. materials/methods), 25/25 replied with no changes needed and regarded the question as irrelevant in the questionnaire.

## Q6: What do I believe I have learned from this course?

3
the advantages and…

5
to consult students
prior planning and
planning with regard
on their
interests/level

6
the role of effective…

11
learned many
activities and how to
make them
comprehensible for
learners

Regarding Q6. " What do I believe I have learned from this course?", 9 out of 25 students replied that they had learned many activities and how to make them comprehensible for learners, 3 students replied that they had learned the advantages and disadvantages of planning, 5 students concluded that they had learned the role of effective lesson planning and what to consider as priorities when planning, 5 students replied that they had learned to consult students prior planning and planning with regard on their interests/level, 1 student referred again to the issue of time/class management, and 2 students believed that they had learned that learners are the center of the plan and should be regarded as so.

## Q7: What do I further need help with?

7
needed more
practice,
explanations and
tasks

11
knew most details
and did not ask for
any further help

7
wished to learn…

Regarding Q7, " What do I further need help with?", 6 out of 25 students believed that they needed more practice, explanations and tasks, 3 students needed help in making the distinction between aims/goals, which they found rather confusing, 6 students wished to learn how to prepare and practice good lesson plans, 8 students believed that they knew most details and did not ask for any further help and 2 students did not reply (left the question unanswered).

Regarding the last question, Q8, which referred to overall commenting regarding the course itself, students commented as they wished. Most answers provided referred to positive remarks and answers varied such as:
Student 1. "It was my pleasure being in this class, it was a really warm and positive atmosphere."
Student 2. " It's a good course. Probably the best and most useful one."
Student 3. " It is a course from which we benefit a lot. Thanks!"
Student 4. " I hope that in the near future, students will be able to learn something from me, because this course helped me learn a lot of things."
Student 5. " Everything in this class suits me. I like the way how I have started to change some ideas about how to prepare and organize lesson plans and being more knowledgeable about doing activities."
Student 6. " Everything is very good. Just continue like this because it is very interesting and we really love it."

### 4.5 Hypotheses results obtained

The main aim of the case study was to determine the level of student awareness regarding different issues of lesson planning, to determine the effectiveness of the course itself and also to include students' suggestions, perceptions and ideas regarding not only the course matter, but in regard to the methodology and approaches used by us. The following hypotheses results were concluded:
Regarding H1, "*The more aware the learners are of planning importance, the better results they achieve,"* results showed that students knew the importance of the course and were therefore very eager to participate, share ideas and opinions and actively part-take in the process.
Regarding H2*, "Defining aims and objectives of a plan (especially at the beginning) are the hardest to define,"* students agreed that actually thinking of and setting aims and objectives was a difficult process due to the many ideas that came to mind and yet needed to be narrowed down. They required assistance and clarification on this part especially, in order to gain the required insights of pre-planning and normally setting goals.
Regarding H3, "*Requiring student feedback stimulates higher motivation and overall success",* results showed that indeed students preferred to be involved in the process and that they appreciated providing suggestions and remarks regarding not only what they needed assistance with, but also what they thought was further needed in the course. The overall scale of motivation was normally higher and students reflected greater success and achievement.

### 5.  CONCLUSION

This case study was developed to become self-critical as teachers and in order to improve certain decisions that we make, either consciously or subconsciously regarding materials, books, approaches and methodology. We sometimes make wrong choices due to change in circumstances, change of position, with the change of scientific titles and of course with higher level of obligations. At the moment, when university assistants become university lecturers, the burden of defining and choosing books and literature for the courses is quite frustrating. The duration of choice is time-consuming, it is an individual aspect of theories that underlie the basic concepts of teaching, and this in fact, differs for each English teacher. The feeling of

self-satisfaction and motivation is in regard to both teachers and learners, and therefore needs analysis can be used as an instrument of measurement for both sides i.e. teachers and learners.

## 5.1 Limitations and further recommendations

Each research consists of certain limitations, however organized we tend to be. Some limitations regarding this case study might be as follows:

- ▶ the number of students could have varied (higher number of participants);
- ▶ the formulation of the questions could have been done otherwise;
- ▶ an additional instrument could have been used etc.
- ▶ With all its drawbacks, however, needs analysis is a very important part of overall feedback and helps us determine elements such as: materials used and their effectiveness, our approach, methodology and theory of teaching. It also provides learners with the opportunity to suggest and share ideas regarding the course matter and maintains higher motivation and self-esteem.

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