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## Needs Analysis--- A Tool For Advance Language Learning: With Reference To Undergraduate Learners Of Assam And Necessity Of Professional Development For The UG Level Teachers Of English In Assam, India.

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**Abstract:** This paper discusses the importance of 'Needs Analysis' and its relevance in the teaching learning process with special reference to English Language. The necessity of performing needs analysis before structuring a course, preparing a syllabus or even designing a task cannot be overlooked. The researcher in this paper will highlight the English language needs of the Undergraduate learners of English studying UG courses in various colleges under Gauhati and Dibrugarh University in Assam, India. Teachers' professional development plays a major role in shaping the learner's future; hence the paper will also pay significant light on the Professional development needs of the UG teachers of English teaching in various colleges in Assam under the two universities mentioned above.

**Index Terms** - needs analysis, teaching, learning, undergraduate, professional development

### Introduction

The term 'needs' can be perceived subjectively as what Hutchinson and Waters (1987) termed as *wants*. Learner wants are the target needs, that are expected by the learners. These assumed needs of learners are expected to get fulfilled at the end from a specific course. However, the concept of needs cannot be objectivised as it is personal and varies from person to person. Therefore, any work concerning with determining the language needs of a specific group of people will be elusive as, a groups' needs may not necessarily match to each other as their language needs may differ from individual to individual. Hence, the term 'needs' cannot be described in one go.

'Communicative Syllabus Design' by John Munby (1978), is perhaps the most remarkable work on needs analysis. In the book, Munby presented a highly detailed set of policies for discovering learners' target situation needs. The work provides a reliable source for identifying and selecting syllabus content which is most relevant to the needs of the target learner group. The author has tried to focus on the needs of the learners, emphasis has been given on designing or selecting content that fulfil learners' needs. These set of procedures are addressed as Communication Needs Processor (CNP) (Hutchinson and Waters.1987, p.54). CNP consists of a range of questions in relation to key communication variables (topic, participants, medium etc.) that are used to identify target language needs of the target learner group.

One question that may arise in the mind of the language teachers, is that, 'what do we mean by needs?' there can be a varied number of interpretations to this concept. According to the language centred approach, the probable answer to this question could be the ability to comprehend. However, needs of the learners in a language course may vary from attaining ability to understand a particular text to reproduce content in the learner's language as and when required.

In order to understand the concept of needs precisely, we shall look at it from two perspectives. The learners Target needs and the learning needs. According to Hutchinson and Waters (1987, P.54), *we can make a basic distinction between target needs and learning needs. The former stands for what the learner needs to do in the target situation. The latter implies what the learners need to do in order to learn.* These are basically the requirements of the learners interpreted by the teachers from a specific course for e.g. the tertiary learners need to write job applications, read textbooks, speak to audience to present papers etc. learning needs on the other hand are often realised by both the learners and the teachers. Their presence makes the teaching-learning sessions effective. An example of a learning need would be *teachers should introduce newer methodologies and techniques to make classes interesting or involving the learners actively in the teaching-learning sessions.* These needs are often not realised but must be addressed in order to run the teaching learning process hassle free. The learning needs set the teaching learning environment which helps in ensuring effective teaching-learning sessions.

'Target situation analysis' (TSA), an expression coined by Chambers (1980), in this context is perhaps the most common application to Needs Analysis. Similarly, Robinson has mentioned the Present situation analysis (PSA) which aims at establishing learners' skill and competence before they undertake any language learning programme. These two aspects of 'needs analyses will be used in the following sections to find out the English language needs of the tertiary level learners in the colleges in Assam.

## Needs analysis

Needs Analysis or Needs Assessment (Touran Ahour and Fatemah Mohseni 2015. MJLTM) plays a crucial role in any language development course design and conduct process. For both English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and English for General Purposes (EGP) courses, identifying target learners' specific language needs should be considered the foundation stages. Any language development course should be built on its learners' underlying language needs and the course must aim at assisting the learners achieve those as the course progresses.

The present study, although is primarily concerned with discovering the professional development needs of the English language teachers teaching at the colleges in Assam, it is at this point imperative to look at both the tertiary level learners' and the teachers' English language needs. In the researcher's view, in order to look for the gaps in the learners' language abilities, assessing what kind of teaching-learning processes they are taken through, what assumptions do the respective teachers carry in relation to English language teaching is unavoidable. Doing this (analysing needs) involve looking closely at the concept of needs and the sets of people who are relevant to the consideration of this concept respectively i.e. the tertiary learners and teachers of English.

First of all, a thorough analysis of the tertiary level learners' English language needs has been carried out. Common-sense advocates that, before designing a course, the needs of the learners for whom it is meant should be found out. However, in practice, content developers hardly spend time in this aspect. Learners have, for a long time, been the passive participants in the teaching-learning process. They are expected to learn whatever is taught in the class and carry home the content instead of developing language skills. Even the teacher's attitude towards the learners is of no exception. Position of the learners in the teaching-learning process all these years have been at the bottom line. Neither they wanted nor the system ever allowed them to come forward and undertake active role in the teaching-learning system. By saying learners did not wanted to take up active parts, the researcher wants to emphasize that learners have never been motivated to do so. They were never aware of their language needs. The primary aim of this research work is to make the stakeholders realize the importance of the learners in the teaching-learning process. Knowing and keeping their (learners) specific language needs in mind while designing the course as well as while conducting classes cannot be overlooked today.

Keeping this aspect in vision, the researcher conducted a survey to some representative colleges in the state in order to find out the learners' assumed English language needs. These needs of the learners will be discussed in detail in later part of this paper.

After identifying the learner's English language needs, the following move was to find out the English teachers' English language needs. For this, it was mandatory to have some face-to-face conversation with the teachers. A similar survey was conducted for this purpose as well and these will also be discussed in detail in later part of this article.

The study undertaken focuses on establishing the need of professional development, commonly perceived as teacher education which, in today's teaching-learning environment cannot be overlooked. Keeping this aspect in mind, the researcher did a professional development need analysis of the English teachers teaching in the colleges in Assam.

### 1. Three perspectives to analyse needs---- *necessities, lacks and wants*

Analyzing learner target needs (Hutchinson & Waters; 1987) i.e. various kinds of needs required to perform in the target situation requires the teacher being aware of a certain notions associated to this.

Hutchinson and Waters (1987) have divided target needs into *necessities, lacks and wants*. And called these three the necessary steps in the process of *Needs Analysis*.

- a. It is very likely that the '**necessities**' will be determined by the **TSA** (Target situation analysis), i.e. where do the teachers or course designers want the learners to reach after completion of the course? For instance, learners undergoing medical studies are expected to become doctors after the completion of the course, or those who undertake mass communication are supposed to do journalism at the end. It is believed that courses should be designed/ the content must be selected keeping the learner's necessities in mind. The researchers' personal experience in this matter adds more to the debate. The researcher, while undergoing the undergraduate course was never aware of her specific English language needs. Neither teachers nor the course content paid any attention to the learners' language needs and its' development. Learning the language skills was an alien concept then. The content was primarily literature based, and classes were conducted in lecture mode. How much learning happens inside such classrooms have never been a concern for both the content developers and teachers. Even after a decade has passed, the researcher strongly believes that not much has changed in this aspect. So many aspects such as the attitude of the teachers teaching in the colleges in Assam (their perspective to learners' needs), the content of the syllabus remain same. Learners still play passive roles inside the classroom. Their needs are not addressed even today. Tertiary learners in the colleges in Assam are still unaware of their English language needs. The course content needs to be changed and a learner centred approach should be adopted.' Leo Jones advocates that 'students can't be *taught*- they can only be helped to learn' (Jones. 2007. P.25). He insists on letting learners explore and learn things on their own with teacher's guidance and introspection as and when required. Teachers must encourage learners for autonomous learning; which will ensure a learner centred approach.

b. '**Lacks**' can be deduced by comparing the TSA and PSA (Present Situation Analysis) carrying out what West (1994) has termed as 'deficiency analysis'

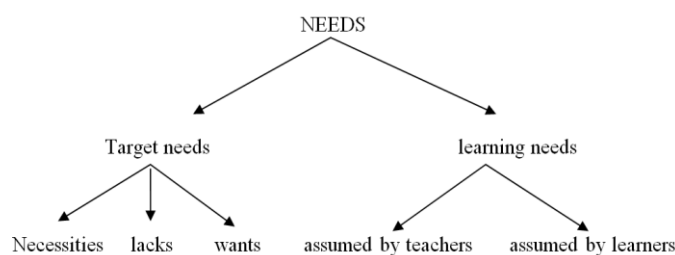
$$\text{TSA-PSA} = \text{Lacks}$$

These assumed lacks of the learners play a crucial role in the course design as well as in the teaching-learning process. Learner lacks are the subtracted outcomes of Present Situation Analysis from the Target Situation Analysis. These are, in common language, the aspirations of the learners which they expect to get fulfilled with progress of the course. Learners' lacks can be illustrated using the following example. A learner undergoing medical studies at initial semesters lacks the ability to diagnose a specific disease and prescribe appropriate medicines. These lacks of the learners need to be addressed in due course of time by the concerned teachers; a failure in this would lead to leaving learners' needs unaddressed. Therefore, the PSA in this case is the learners' inability to diagnose the disease and specify treatment and the TSA will be enabling the learners to detect the disease and prescribe the required treatment as a cure.

c. **Wants**' come under the category of what Brindly (1989) has called the 'subjective' needs. Wants are basically what the learners wish from a specific course. For example, while conducting survey for collecting data, the researcher asked students for their reasons for studying English language. The responses of most of the students were to become competent in English language. Whereas, they may be completely unaware of what does a language learning course imply. Wants in general stand for the learners' wishes and expectations from any specific course. Learner wants can sometimes be in respect to the way the teachers teach. For example, learners sometimes may want use of audio-visual aids for a specific lesson, or in some cases they may be more comfortable with the teachers' explanations. Such instances of wants also play a significant role in the teaching-learning process. Unfortunately, most of the learners of this country are taught using the age-old traditional teaching-learning method. Learners of the North-eastern region of the country specifically are unaware of their language needs and wants. During the survey the researcher tried to elicit from the tertiary learners what are their wants to which they were unable to respond as expected. These learners are always spoon fed by the teachers and are dependent upon the teachers for everything. They have never been encouraged or put in a situation to come out of their comfort zone and try to learn things differently. They seemed to be happy playing the passive role.

Thus, any course irrespective of their genre or discipline, must be designed keeping the target learners' *necessities, lacks and wants* in mind. Doing this would ensure actual learning and fulfilling the teaching-learning objectives. Teachers need to consider learners needs, lacks and wants while planning lessons.

The researcher, in order to identify the English language needs of the target learners (in this context, the tertiary learners) have followed the framework of *Target Needs & Learning Needs* suggested by Hutchinson & Waters (1987). The two perspectives of needs within the context of teaching-learning are:



*Fig.1. Perspectives of analysing needs*

### i. Target needs of the tertiary learners

A target need is the language need of the learner that requires to be fulfilled in order to function effectively in the target situation. These needs are derived from analysing target situation and the learner behaviour in the target situation. These target situations in the present context are the different situations in which the tertiary learners are supposed to use the target language. Target needs are determined by analyzing the target situation and the required linguistic responses. It is further divided into necessities, lacks and wants. The following table will represent the target needs of the students as gathered from the data collected from the teachers and learners from various colleges in Assam.



<p><b>Target Needs</b></p>	<p><b>Necessities</b></p> <p>➔</p>	<p>As far as the <b>academic</b> English language needs are concerned, learners are often required to do the following:</p> <p>Write answers in examinations, write experiments (science students), make notes, write seminar papers, write dissertations, write applications, write CVs etc.</p> <p>Read textbooks, reference books, journals and articles on current affair related to their subject matter.</p> <p>Speak fluently with teachers. Interact with peers inside the classroom, participate in seminar presentations, take part in group discussions etc.</p> <p>Listen to the teachers' lectures, listen to instructions and follow them, listen to oral texts and comprehend.</p> <p>Some of their work-related i.e. future professional needs are: Write formal letters to clients, customers, sponsors etc. Give written instructions to juniors at work. Issue memos Write seminar papers, books, research papers etc.</p> <p>Read books related to current affairs, read manuals to perform a Certain job. Read and identify information from the internet.</p> <p>Speak fluently with various people at work such as clients, colleagues, seniors, juniors. Make effective presentations during seminars, conferences.</p> <p>D. Listen to clients, customers and other people at work. Listen attentively in seminars, conferences.</p> <p>At the <b>personal</b> ground some of their English language needs are: Write CVs and resumes to apply for a job. Fill up forms Write short messages</p> <p>Read newspapers, current affairs Read signboards, maps, atlases to locate a place /information.</p> <p>Speak fluently to various people.</p> <p>Listen to live commentaries. Listen and understand whatever they hear</p>
<p><b>Target Needs</b></p>	<p><b>Lacks</b></p> <p>➔</p>	<p>TSA-PSA=Lacks</p> <p>Some of the common English language lacks of the General English students are</p> <p><b>Writing</b> Inability to write coherently Difficulty in expressing their thought in clear logical language Poor grasp over grammar and spelling Lack of knowledge about the different styles of writing Inability to construct meaningful sentences. Unable to write applications and letters.</p> <p><b>Reading</b> Inability in comprehending texts in English Unaware of the skill of guessing meaning from the context or identifying a specific information from the text.</p> <p><b>Speaking</b> Poor pronunciation skill specially in pronouncing long and short vowel sounds, affricates etc. Inability to utter correct grammatical sentences.</p>

		<p>Have difficulty in making effective spoken communication in English language in any situation</p> <p><b>Listening</b></p> <p>Often find it difficult to understand/ comprehend a text by listening to a teachers' lecture</p> <p>Unable to identify the differences between homophones, long and short vowel sounds.</p>
<b>Target Needs</b>	<b>Wants</b> →	<p>Some of the common wants of the tertiary level learners are:</p> <p>Want to develop their English language abilities</p> <p>Get prepared to meet future challenges in terms of higher studies or in getting a job</p> <p>Want to work on developing the two productive skills i.e. speaking and writing</p> <p>Want to take part in group or pair work inside classrooms.</p> <p>Develop their pronunciation and grammatical knowledge of English language</p> <p>Do activities, tasks, play skits; play games in the language class.</p> <p>Make oral presentations</p> <p>Want to develop their confidence by becoming fluent in English Language.</p>

**Table.1.** *Necessities, lacks and wants of tertiary level learners of G.E*

## ii. Learning needs of the tertiary learners (as assumed by the teachers and the learners)

So far, many discussions have been carried out regarding the target situation needs. Concern has been shown to the question, *what skills and abilities will the learners require in order to perform well in the target situation?* Supposing the starting point (lacks) and the end point (necessities), viewing (wants) what the destination should be (Hutchinson & Waters.1987, p. 60). We have not yet discussed much about the route. The question for discussion at this point is, *how will our learners achieve the target needs?* These questions lead us to another kind of need, the *learning needs*.

Learning needs are the needs realized by the learners and teachers during the learning process. Often, these needs may not be mentioned clearly but they do mark a significant place in the teaching-learning process. These needs are often not realised but they need to be maintained in order to run the teaching learning process smoothly. The learning needs set the teaching learning environment which assist in ensuring effective teaching-learning sessions. Some of the learning needs of the tertiary learners are:

<b>Learning needs</b>	<p>The tertiary teachers of English feel that there should be facilities like audio visual aids in the language classrooms.</p> <p>Teacher-student ratio needs to be maintained in order to get the expected outcome.</p> <p>There should be involvement of the teachers in the course design process.</p> <p>Learners need to be given equal importance and the teacher should encourage them to take part in the teaching learning process.</p> <p>Steps are to be taken to encourage learner motivation in learning the language.</p> <p>Teachers should introduce newer methodologies and techniques to make classes interesting.</p> <p>Teachers need to train learners in self-learning, group and pair activities</p> <p>Teachers must regularly write lesson plans and teacher journals and follow them as a part of their job.</p>
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**Table 2.** *Some of the learning needs of tertiary level learners of G.E*

**Significance:**

Learning needs play an important role in the teaching-learning system as, these help in establishing the desired context in which learning would take place. These needs are considered important as their presence influence the teaching-learning session to a great extent. Both the tertiary learners and the teachers need to pay equal importance to these needs so that the learning objectives can be obtained. For instance, when the teachers realise their shortcomings and take necessary steps to develop them, they ensure better and effective teaching. Inclusion of audio-visual aids inside the classrooms can make the sessions interesting. Similarly, teachers can make the classes more interesting by introducing newer methodologies while teaching such as implementing group/pair work. Engaging learners in classroom activities, assigning responsibilities etc. can be introduced by the teacher to make teaching-learning sessions effective. Teachers' involvement in the selection and designing of the content is yet another important learning need. It is needless to say, when teachers are involved in the material development process, they can ensure that the content meets the learners needs and course objectives can be achieved. Self-reflection practice by the teachers is another important learning need that needs special mention. These practice sessions enable the teachers identify areas where they need to work in order to modify their teaching.

From the above discussion, it is understood that the learning needs help in making teaching-learning sessions effective and enjoyable. Often, the presence of these needs are not realised, but their absence certainly makes a big difference in the process of achieving teaching-learning objectives, in learner behaviour, in teacher's attitude etc. Learning needs make the teaching sessions alive. Learners' involvement teachers' self-reflection, etc. together add in making sessions more effective.

**1. English language needs of the tertiary level teachers of English**

**Needs** play an important role in every individual's life; be it a professional need or a learning need. Every one's needs may differ from each other. Just as the tertiary learners of the colleges in Assam, the teachers teaching English language also have several English language needs. This aspect is often ignored by the stakeholders assuming that the teachers know everything. While talking about the teaching-learning process, both the teachers and the learners are to be considered equally important. Only looking at the learners' needs is not sufficient. Finding out the teachers' English language needs is equally important. The reason behind doing this was to establish the fact that, if as teachers we want to know what our learner's needs are, it is equally important to know what are our (teachers') needs are. Because, most of the teachers teaching in the colleges in Assam seemed to be ignorant about learners' English language needs. When probed, they were not able to specify language needs of their learners. This particular aspect insisted the researcher to find out the tertiary teachers' English language needs. This section would now focus on the tertiary level English teachers' English language needs. Following are some of the English language needs identified by the researcher.

<b>Teachers' English Language Needs</b>	The teachers of English at the tertiary level need to: explain texts using simple language simplify the texts according to the level of the learners develop their proficiency in English language to help learners learn the language respond to learners' queries and doubts read and comprehend texts in English language make lesson plans beforehand write teacher journals or logbooks regularly as a part of self-reflection.
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*Table 3. English language needs of the teachers of G.E at tertiary level*

**2. Professional development needs of the teachers**

The term 'Professional Development' forms the most crucial component of the study. The primary focus of the research work is to establish the necessity of a quality professional development course for the teachers of English at the tertiary education in Assam. The University of Management and Technology (UMT) Virginia notes the use of the phrase 'Professional Development' the year 1857 onwards. The term 'professional development' in this context stands for in-service teachers' professional development. Teaching is a complex cognitive activity and it demands the teachers to invest both physical and mental abilities to make their

teaching sessions effective. Teachers' beliefs and abilities influence their teaching. Borg (2003. p.81) emphasizes that *teachers are active thinking decision-makers who make instructional choices by drawing on complex practical-oriented, personalized and context-sensitive networks of knowledge, thoughts and beliefs.*

Teachers' professional development today, is regarded one of the most essential requirements to be fulfilled by the teaching professionals. Teachers' growth often arises from ongoing activity of teaching, often from the daily classroom engagements (Francis Peter. 2012, P.1). Teachers' growth may also come from self-reflection done by the teachers after conducting classes. Teachers' professional development is considered crucial for teachers as learners today have varied needs. The situation demand teachers acquire newer techniques and methodologies that would make teaching learning sessions alive. The need for ongoing teacher education is significantly the recurring theme in the field of language teaching in recent times. Teachers as individuals have different types of needs according to the different types of situations they are in. These can be needs for career, needs in relation to their professional life and so on.

The previous units of this chapter discussed the target English language needs and the learning needs of the learners along with the assumed English language needs of the English teachers. To meet the needs of the learners, teachers need some additional qualities/ abilities. They need to step out of their comfort zone and adapt things according to the needs and level of understanding of their learners. This section will now look at the professional development needs of the English teachers at the colleges in Assam.

The following table will discuss the professional development needs of the teachers.

<p><b>English Teachers' Professional Development Needs</b></p>	<p>Besides the content knowledge, the English language teachers need to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>master newer techniques and methodologies for taking classes.</li> <li>plan lessons addressing learner needs.</li> <li>adapt techniques that increase learner motivation, discourage rote learning.</li> <li>inculcate techniques to avoid spoon feeding learners, make classes learner centred.</li> <li>self-reflect and work on their shortcomings.</li> <li>attend refresher courses, FDPs, workshops, seminars/webinars to know about current innovations and newer methodologies in language teaching.</li> <li>develop interest in research and publication of papers.</li> <li>upgrade knowledge in ICT skills to adapt technological tools for language teaching.</li> <li>read related journals, articles and texts to conduct interactive and fruitful teaching sessions.</li> <li>consider peer observation to investigate areas for development as teachers.</li> <li>develop effective strategies for assessing learners.</li> <li>collaborate with colleagues for exchange of views and ideas.</li> </ul>
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**Table 4.** Professional development needs of the teachers of G.E at tertiary level

### **Why Professional Development needs?**

The professional development needs mentioned in the table above, are some of the unavoidable requirements of teachers of English today. Language teachers today need to handle several aspects of learners besides teaching. Such aspects include upgrade knowledge in ICT skills, plan lessons addressing learner needs, develop strategies to assess learners, get involved in research and publication related work, do self-reflection on their own teaching etc. Such activities demand teachers put extra effort in their self-assessment and development. Professional development of teachers is not required only for developing better teaching methodologies in the teachers but also for making teachers realise the needs and necessities of upgrading their abilities as professionals. According to Penny Ur (1996), the main tools for professional development are available within our own teaching routine; teachers own teaching experiences and reflection on own teaching, peer discussion and student's feedback (Penny Ur. 1996, p. 289). As mentioned by the experts, teacher's professional development is a continuous ongoing process and it may happen anytime anywhere. In-service



teachers need not always to go and attend professional trainings from some experts within the confined walls of a training room for this.

Considering the aspects mentioned above, the researcher has arrived at the conclusion that, identifying the professional development needs of the English language teachers was important at this point of this study as, this would accelerate the discussion towards the right direction i.e. focus on the necessity and importance of teacher education. The professional development needs mentioned in the table above indicate that language teaching in the recent times is beyond teaching using the traditional teacher centered method where learners always play the role of passive participants. Learners nowadays, have their own way to comprehend and interpret things. And teachers must know and address these.

## Summary

This paper is concerned with finding out the 'Needs' of both the learners and the teachers of the tertiary education in the colleges in Assam. The assumed needs discussed in the chapter were drawn from the data collected from the surveys made to different colleges across the state. The data was categorized in two different categories viz. *target needs* and *learning needs*. Furthermore, the target needs were classified into 'necessities, lacks and wants'. The learning needs were fetched from both the teachers and the learners' perspectives. Thereafter, in the following section, the English teachers' English language needs were also analysed as, based on that, many decisions are taken by the language teacher inside the classroom. The last section of this chapter highlighted teachers' professional development needs, which is one of the most important aspects of the research work.

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