

A Needs Analysis survey in the EFL/ ESL class of a Greek Junior-High School and ICTs' role

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Abstract: The purpose of the particular paper is to develop and design a Needs Analysis questionnaire so as to examine the needs, wants and lacks of a specific group of learners, describe it and provide ideas for implementation in the EFL classroom. In the first part, there is a short literature review on Needs Analysis with reference to its significance in the EFL context and its components. In the second part, there is a description of the current teaching context, including learners' profile, the curriculum, the coursebooks and the constraints. In the third part, there is a description of the particular questionnaire, while at the same time its rationale is presented. In the fourth part, there is an outline in flow chart format of all the steps in carrying out this needs analysis, from constructing the questionnaire to analyzing the final results. In the final part, there is a reflection on the significance of the particular needs analysis for the EFL classroom.

1. Literature Review

Needs Analysis (N.A) is an important process in curriculum and course development (Brown, 1995; Richards, 2001) and according to many scholars (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987; Nunan, 1988; Brindley, 1989; Robinson, 1991; Brown, 1995; Seedhouse, 1995; West, 1997; Dudley-Evans & St. Johns, 1998; Graves, 2000; Richards, 2001; Long, 2005; Brown, 2009) it should be the first step in the whole design process. Its purpose is to identify learners' needs, evaluate, adapt instructional materials and modify the existing course or design a new one based on them (West, 1994 :20; Brown, 1995) so as to increase learners' learning potential (McDonough & Shaw, 1993). The particular term refers to the necessities (what learners should know), lacks (learners' weaknesses), wants (what they need to know or study), desires (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987), constraints and expectations of learners from the teaching and learning process (their stance towards EFL/ their ambitions) (Brindley, 1989:28; Manolopoulou-Sergi, 2004). According to Richards (1990:2), Needs Analysis is a fundamental step to the planning of English courses. Finally, learners' needs is an ongoing process that should take place quite often, as they may change over time (Brown, 1995; Holliday, 1994; Hutchinson & Waters, 1987; Nunan, 1988; Richterich & Chancerel, 1977), while Nunan (1989a) stressed the importance of needs analysis in designing a learner-centered curriculum or course. Through the in-class questionnaires, which is an important step to long-term course design and development, this goal can be achieved, while according to Corad (1999) & Spratt (1999) their implementation is considered to be a great educational principle.

2. Description of the current teaching situation

The participants of the particular survey were 16 Greek students (9 male and 7 female ones), aged 12-13, attending the first grade of a Greek junior high school. All learners are monolingual and they have been learning English from the first grade of primary school, while at the same time they show a

positive stance towards English as a foreign language and they are motivated to participate actively in the whole learning process. The group's competence levels range from intermediate to upper-intermediate (B1-B2) according to the CEFR (2021). The coursebook used in the particular level is called 'B1 for all' and it has been designed to prepare learners for B- level exams. It is composed of 20 units, each one of them divided into two lessons, including reading, vocabulary, grammar, writing, speaking and listening. Concerning the constraints, there are various to deal with. First of all, the lesson takes place three times a week for 45 minutes at a time, which is inadequate and limited for the appropriate preparation of learners for B1-B2 level exams by the end of the school year (time allowance). Moreover, the sitting arrangement is fixed as there is not enough space in the particular class for any possible change or even for team/ pair work. At the same time, the technological equipment to supplement the EFL classroom is really poor, while there are numerous times that there is no internet access, resulting in this way in the postponement of a class activity, project or even assignment.

3. Description and rationale of the questionnaire

The particular needs analysis questionnaire (Appendix I) is called 'Do you like English?'. In the first part, there is an introduction, stating the questionnaire's purpose and some general guidelines upon its implementation (Taylor-Powell, 1998). It is a small-scale analysis, since the respondents are a small group of high school learners (16 learners) (Dornyei, 2003). Thus, it is not offered for generalization, but it refers to the needs and the lacks of the particular learners (Kantaridou, 2018b: 21). Apart from that, the use of a class-specific questionnaire is fundamental to course planning, because through it the needs of particular learners are acknowledged and catered. It is divided into three parts, the attitudes of learners towards English as a foreign language, their needs and finally, their preferences for particular activities, models of work and topics. The questions used are closed-ended and more specifically checklists (tick) and rating scales, requiring a very specific answer (tick the box, use a smiley face), so as to look friendlier and more attractive to learners (Taylor- Powell, 1988).

More specifically, in the first part, there are ten options provided to learners regarding the reasons why they learn English and they are supposed to put a tick, showing their preferences. This is a closed-ended type activity presented in a checklist form.

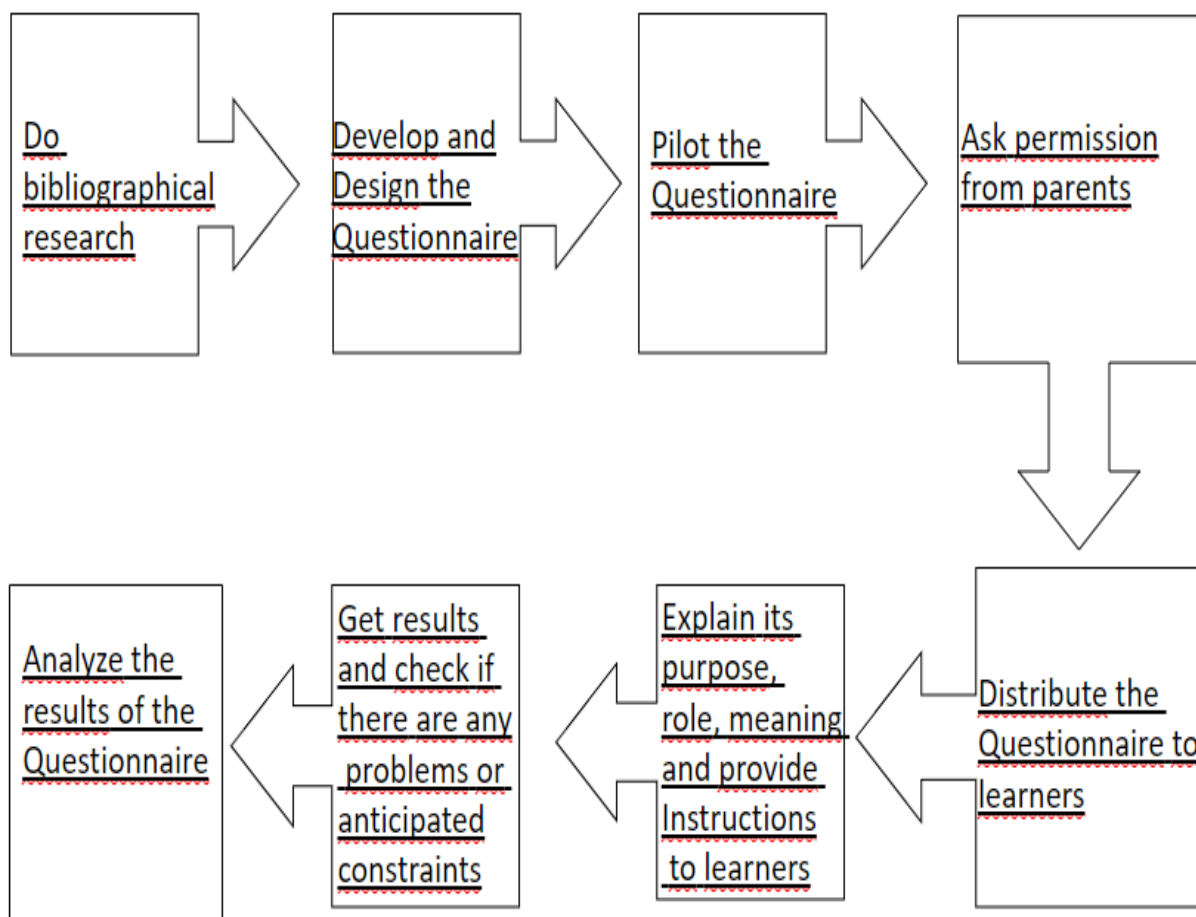
The second part is subdivided into two smaller ones. In the first one, learners are required to give a positive answer (by putting a tick) only in the boxes indicating their favourite English language skills (eg. speaking). This is a closed-ended activity, requiring very specific answers. In the second part, they are presented with a table and they are supposed to rate from 1-5 all the skills presented (8) in the table according to the difficulty they may face in each one of them. So, this is a closed-ended type Likert-scale, while learners are supposed to use smiley faces, which are quite interesting and engaging to them (Dornyei, 2003: 26).

The third part is divided into two smaller ones. In the first one, learners are asked about the way they prefer to learn in order to develop every skill (reading, vocabulary) or how they prefer to work (pairs/ groups or individually). They are supposed to use a smiley face in the appropriate space (yes-no, don't know). This is a type of Likert-scale. Finally, in the second part, learners are provided with a table including 10 items- their favourite topics from the coursebook for discussion in the EFL classroom and they are supposed to tick only the ones that trully motivate them. So, this is once again a closed-ended type.

Several conclusions emerge from this analysis. First of all, the majority of learners seem to learn English because they want to get a certificate in the near future, communicate with tourists and find a good job in the future (extrinsic motivation, Dornyei, 1998). Additionally, they claimed that they prefer speaking and listening skills instead of reading and writing, while at the same time a great number of learners states that needs more practice/ help in writing and vocabulary use. Finally,

learners stated that they prefer pair and group- work as a mode of work, while the use of technology, webtools and applications in the EFL classroom is quite useful and interesting for them. Also, it was clear that they favoured learning by doing (talking, playing, practicing) instead of memorizing or dealing with traditional and old-fashioned activities. Finally, their favourite topics were those concerning technology and applications, their daily routine, sports and music, revealing in this way their interests in their everyday life. Thus, the teacher-course developer had the chance to investigate learners' needs and plan the new course according to them or even engage learners in the designing process.

4. Outline of the required steps for the particular Needs Analysis



A Needs Analysis is composed of several steps, so as to present reliable and valid results. This process will lead to the design and implementation of the appropriate teaching practices for a particular group of learners. The first step is to take into account the theoretical background of Needs Analysis so as to construct the questionnaire based on literature review and research. The second is the actual design and development of the questionnaire, focusing on the wording of the questions and the way in which the teacher will make it more appealing and attractive to learners. Then, piloting of the questionnaire follows. It is distributed to others so as to spot any possible problems and deal with

them. In the fourth step, parents are asked to give permission to the teacher, so as to carry out the N.A questionnaire with their children (Appendix II). Then, the questionnaire is distributed to a particular group of learners, while at the same time they are given detailed instructions and guidance on how to complete it individually. Finally, the teacher collects the data from the questionnaire, checks whether there are any problems or constraints and analyzes the results so as to reconstruct or even construct appropriate classroom practices.

5. Reflection on the significance of Needs Analysis for classroom practice

According to Davies (2006), teachers' knowledge of their learners' needs and interests is of paramount importance as it can lead them to make vital decisions upon the design, development or the modification of a course and their teaching practices. The Needs Analysis questionnaires offer teachers the chance to explore every dimension of both their learners and their courses thoroughly and then, plan and adapt their teaching and instructional tools according to the existing needs and constraints. These decisions contribute to the increase of learners' motivation to learn English in order to communicate with others, while there is significant improvement of their skills. Through the use of communicative and meaningful activities, learners' oral and writing skills are enhanced, they engage actively in the whole process, while their involvement in class activities increases significantly when they perform pair or group-work activities (collaborative work) or when they play games or use technology and different technological tools for educational purposes. Finally, Needs Analysis questionnaires are important for classroom practice, as materials and courses are modified and planned according to learners' needs, interesting authentic materials are used (Brinton, 1991) topics are chosen accordingly so as to engage learners throughout the whole process (Vincent, 1984), while classes obtain a learner-centered character, where necessary ongoing adjustments are made in order to compensate for any weaknesses students may face.

6. Conclusion

The particular Needs Analysis Questionnaire was carried out in order to explore and detect learners' wants, desires, lacks, strengths, weaknesses and ambitions concerning English as a foreign language. In other words, it contributed significantly to teacher's attempt to investigate and better understand a particular- local group of learners, reformulate their teaching objectives, reconsider the structure of their EFL course, reconstruct it and create the instructional material and content of their class so as to suit their learners' special needs (Richards, 1990; Savignon, 1997; Tarone & Yule, 1989). Consequently, their needs were central to the design and development of the new course and not the teachers' general and teacher-centered objectives and goals (Seedhouse, 1995; Spratt, 1999; Young, 2000). Finally, according to Crookes & Schmidt (1991) the new reconstructed course will be more motivating, engaging and successful, since learners' interests and needs will be catered, served and taken into consideration.

Finally, it is important to highlight the productive and effective role that digital technologies play in the education sector. These technologies, such as mobile devices (22-30), a variety of ICT applications (31-67), AI & STEM ROBOTICS (68-86), and games (87-90), facilitate and enhance educational procedures such as assessment, intervention, and learning. Additionally, the use of ICTs in conjunction with theories and models of metacognition, mindfulness, meditation, and the cultivation of emotional intelligence [91-136], as well as with environmental factors and nutrition [18-21], accelerates and improves educational practices and outcomes, particularly for language learning activities, assessment and intervention.

7. References

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Appendix

Needs Analysis Questionnaire

‘Do you like English?’

Hello everyone,

This is a questionnaire for you to fill-in so as to better understand your needs, interests and lacks in order to improve our lessons and make them more interesting and appealing to you, adapted to your needs. There is no right or wrong answer, so feel free to express yourself.

Remember:

1. Read the following questions carefully.
2. Answer all the questions.
3. Give true answers only.

1. Learners’ attitude to English language

Answer the following question by putting a tick. You can choose more than one boxes.

Why do you learn English?	TICK
<i>I learn English because I want to...</i>	(✓)
find a good job.	
get an English certificate (lower/ proficiency).	
make my parents happy, because they push me to.	
travel to many countries abroad.	
talk with tourists from other countries.	
understand the lyrics of the songs I like.	
watch the films I want without asking for help.	
use the Net easier.	
learn foreign languages, such as English.	
take up a new hobby.	

2. Learners' needs/wants/lacks

Which of the following language skills are your favorite? Put a tick in the boxes that show them.

My favorite language skills are...	TICK (✓)
Listening	
Speaking	
Reading	
Writing	

Look at the table and rate according to the difficulty you may face in the following skills. Use smiley faces (☺☹) and remember that 1—the lowest, while 5—the highest.

I have difficulty in..... and I need more practice/ help.	1	2	3	4	5
Listening					
Speaking					
Reading					
Writing					
Spelling					
Vocabulary use					
Grammar					

3. Learners' preferences

Look at the following table and use smiley faces, so as to show your favorite way of learning.

I like learning by...	😊 (yes)	😐 (no)	😬 (don't know)
watching videos/ films			
surfing the net			
using applications/ webtools			
listening to music			
chatting with others			
playing games			
doing/ acting/ creating			
studying			
memorizing/ learning by heart			
solving exercises			

Look at the table and use smiley faces in order to show which of the following is your favorite mode of work.

I like working...	😊 (yes)	😐 (no)	😬 (don't know)
individually			
in pairs			
in groups/ teams			

Which of the following topics do you find interesting? Put a tick in the boxes that show your favorite ones.

Topics	TICK (✓)
technology (gadgets/ social media/ internet)	
hobbies	
family	
friends	
everyday life	
music	
physical appearance	
nutrition	
environment	