Learning Needs – A Neglected Terrain: Implications of Need Hierarchy Theory for ESP Needs

Analysis

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ABSTRACT

ESP, a well-groomed branch of ELT, is distinguished from General English due to its comprehensive needs analysis on the deliberate level. This study focuses on the viewpoint that *learning needs,* which deal with the psychological, social and methodological concerns of ESP learners and ESP classroom, are ignored or not given the due positions in needs analysis for ESP programs. However learning needs are equally important if not more than the target needs. Motivation constitutes a large part of learning needs. Interactivity may be developed between the needs analysis and the existing work motivation theories, particularly Maslow's Need Hierarchy theory. This study theoretically analyzes the relationship of Need Hierarchy theory of work motivation and ESP needs analysis. It also suggests some areas for the analysis of motivational (learning) needs of learners if the theory of Need Hierarchy applied on overall ESP program, ranging from needs analysis to syllabus designing, ESP material selection, ESP classroom teaching, testing and evaluation and finally even ESP teachers' training. This concludes that a very strong interactivity is present between ESP needs analysis and Need Hierarchy theory, raising the significance of learning needs in overall ESP program.

Key words: ESP, Needs analysis, Need Hierarchy theory, Communicative Need Processor, learning needs, target needs

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Needs Analysis: A Distinction of ESP

The concept of needs analysis is growing almost in all disciplines of education, particularly in language teaching. However, what distinguishes ESP from General English is not the existence of needs but the awareness of the needs. The matter of fact is that the ESP learners are conscious of their needs. In the main, ESP deals with the adult learners who are made aware of what they are going to learn. The fundamental queries of *what, why, who, how* are analyzed, long before the actual course starts. Needs analysis, in ESP, plays the vital role in determining the overall ESP program i.e. course design, material selection, ESP classroom activities, testing and evaluation, and ESP teachers' training programs (Berwick, 1988; Brindley, 1984a, 1984b; Fatihi, 2003; Munby, 1978; Nunan, 1989; Richterich, 1980).

1.2. Work Motivation Theories in ESP

Over the past half century there has been a profusion of work on motivation theories. Different theories have been put forwarded to explore different aspects of human behavior. The theories were, then applied on different fields and surprisingly they produced wonderful results. Here are five major motivational theories proposed from environmental, social, dispositional and cognitive perspectives:

1. Need Hierarchy Theory by Maslow (1954)

2. Expectancy Theory by Vroom (1964)

3. Equity Theory by Adams (1965)

4. Reinforcement Theory or Operant Conditioning and Behaviorism by Skinner (1953)

5. Goal Setting Theory by Locke (1968)

Though these theories are in vogue in business and organizational environment; however their origin leis, not in the commercial expansions of the companies, but in the desire to explore multifaceted functioning of human brain and psychology. Later on different disciplines adapted and applied them on their subjects and exploited them. This can be argued with certainty that the business stockholders and commercial organizations are not the sole proprietors of these theories.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Above stated, work motivation theories can be manipulated in language teaching as well as in other branches of knowledge. ESP is distinguished due to its needs analysis on the awareness level of both the learners and the teachers. Motivation is one of the fundamental learning needs; hence it seems quite significant to discuss the implications of these theories for ESP needs analysis and thus on the whole ESP program. However, the theoretical discussion in this paper focuses on one of major work motivation theories: Need hierarchy theory of work motivation. Following questions have been discussed:

1. How *target needs* and *learning needs* are different from each other?
2. What is interpretation of Munby's CNP model in context of learning needs?
3. Is 'Need Hierarchy Theory' significant for ESP needs analysis?
4. How much may it be related with overall ESP program specifically for needs analysis?
5. What kind of information is required for needs analysis based on the findings about the relationship of Need Hierarchy theory with ESP needs analysis?

2.1. Target Needs

Target needs deal with the question what knowledge and abilities the learners will require being able to perform to the required degree of competence in the target situation. The target situation needs can be further elucidated:

2.1.1. Necessities.

These needs are determined by the demands of the target situation. It means what the learner has to know in order to function effectively in the target situation. For instance, a businessperson might need to understand business letters, to communicate effectively at sales conferences, to get the necessary information from sales catalogues. He or she will also need to know the linguistics features – discoursal, functional, structural, lexical, and most commonly used in the situations identified.

2.1.2. Lacks.

It is required to know what the learner knows already, so that it can be decided then which of the necessities the learners lack. One target situation necessity might be to read texts in a particular subject area. Whether or not the learners need instruction in doing this will depend on how well they can do it already. The target proficiency needs to be matched against the existing proficiency of the learners' lack (Hutchinson & Waters, 1984).

2.1.3. Wants.

The learners too have a view as to what their needs are. According to Richterich (1980) the existence of need is associated with the perceptions and desires of a person. Needs do not exist in reality, it is rather an image of personal feelings that the learners express on the basis of data pertinent to their environment. So, *wants* are, in fact, the reflection of learners' own perceptions.

2.2. Learning Needs

Learning needs are linked with the 'route' to the destination set by target situation. It is naïve to base the course design and the whole ESP program merely on target needs. The methodological, administrative and psychological needs must occupy the same space in needs analysis as the target needs do. ESP learning is not a mechanical project to be imposed mechanically on the learners. The whole ESP program is an enjoyable, pleasing, manageable, generative, creative and productive activity. It is only

possible when it is based on the full potential and constraints of both target needs and the learning situation. It needs to be clear, at this point, that *learning* is a broader term than *learner*. Though, being the most fundamental building block, a *learner* is the central *part*, yet not the whole of a *learning* process. There is much more in the overall learning process than just the learner to consider. Altman and James (1980), though following the term of *learner-centered* language teaching, points out three main distinctions of the learning or learner-centered approach in comparison with curriculum-centered and teacher-centered instruction. In learner-centered teaching approach, the needs and abilities of the learners determine the curriculum details and teaching requirements of the course. There are four main perspectives to view the learner-centered language teaching program: goals, means, rate, expectations. Further, the teachers are trained in way they can fulfill the needs of learners.

Hence, in the context of ESP program, learning needs can be viewed from three main perspectives:
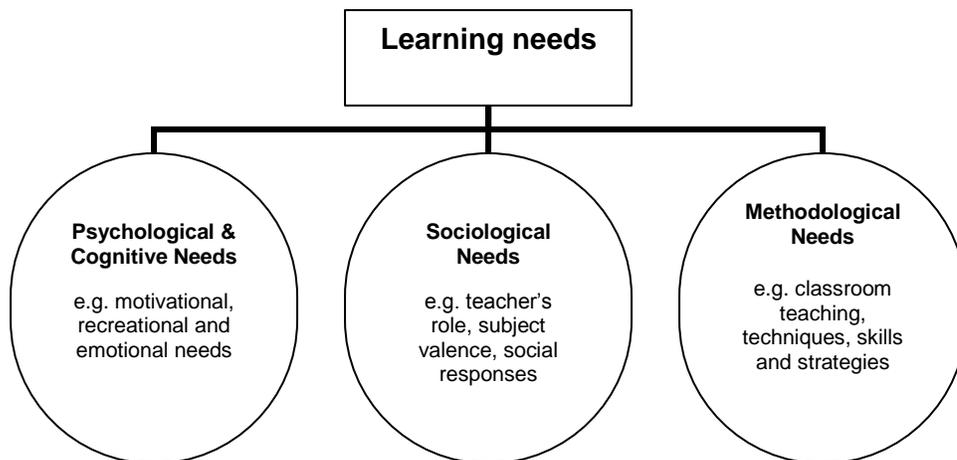

Fig.1. Learning needs of ESP learners

Learning needs aim at the personal concerns of the learners. Like target needs they influence and affect the overall ESP program ranging form syllabus designing to testing and evaluation. If needs analysis is the major distinction of ESP program, the learning needs then have the pivotal role to play in needs analysis. Any need analysis without involving learning needs may be a weak model, excluding the major psychological, sociological and methodological concerns of the ESP learners.

2.3. Munby's Communicative Needs Processor (CNP)

The well-known work in the development of ESP needs analysis is the 'Communicative Needs Process (CNP)' by Munby (1978) in "Communicative Syllabus Design". Mc Donough (1999) asserts the worldwide acceptance of this theoretical work which has been extensively used as a working model, modified and unmodified in many parts of the word to operate language teaching programs.

The central idea of Munby's formation of his framework is the concept of language user's competence and its relation to knowledge and communication. In an attempt to specify validity in the target communicative competence, Munby designs what is known as Communicative Needs Processor (CNP). Teachers of English, especially those concerned with the teaching of ESP, highly utilize this approach to the analysis of needs and follow the model for specifying communicative competence.

Hawkey (1980) sums up the kinds of questions to which the course designer has to find answers in order to build up his learners' communication needs profile and the parameter labels under which they are asked are:

Participant.

There are questions on learner's age, sex, nationality, first language, target language, and other languages. Such information represents input to the CNP, that is, the eight ordered sets of questions, answers to which fill out the profile.

Purposive Domain.

There are questions to establish the purposes for which English will be needed i.e. occupational or educational, for which specific job or studies.

Setting.

There are questions to reveal relevant information on the place, time and psycho-social nature of the setting in which English will have to be used.

Interaction.

There are questions to get information on the required role of the learners in communication for which they are being trained, the identity of those with whom they will have to communicate and the relationship with them.

Instrumentality.

There are questions to seek information on medium, mode and channel of communication for which learners need to be trained.

Dialect.

There are questions to obtain information on what dialects of English will need to be handled.

Target Level.

There are questions to assign values to various characteristics (e.g. size, range, delicacy, speed, flexibility) of the communication in English that the learners will have to cope with, both receptively and productively.

Communicative Event.

There are questions to identify what the learner will have to do in English, productively and receptively. This is described in terms of communicative events which are then subdivided into communicative activities.

Communicative Key.

There are questions to consider the tone manner and spirit in which an act is done. The ability to handle communication must take account of varying degrees of attitude as expressed through tone.

3. DISCUSSION

3.1. Analysis of Munby's CNP Model in Context of Learning Needs

Munby (1978) focuses on the target needs only. Munby's model is highly workable for the target situation needs analysis. The model seems indifferent from the learners' *learning* needs. In fact it deals merely with the occupational needs of learners. This model can better explain what the curricular contents are to be taught to the professional learners but does not give much for the aspects related to the psychological and working needs of the learners. The description followed analyses Mynby's model, pointing out what is lacking in it.
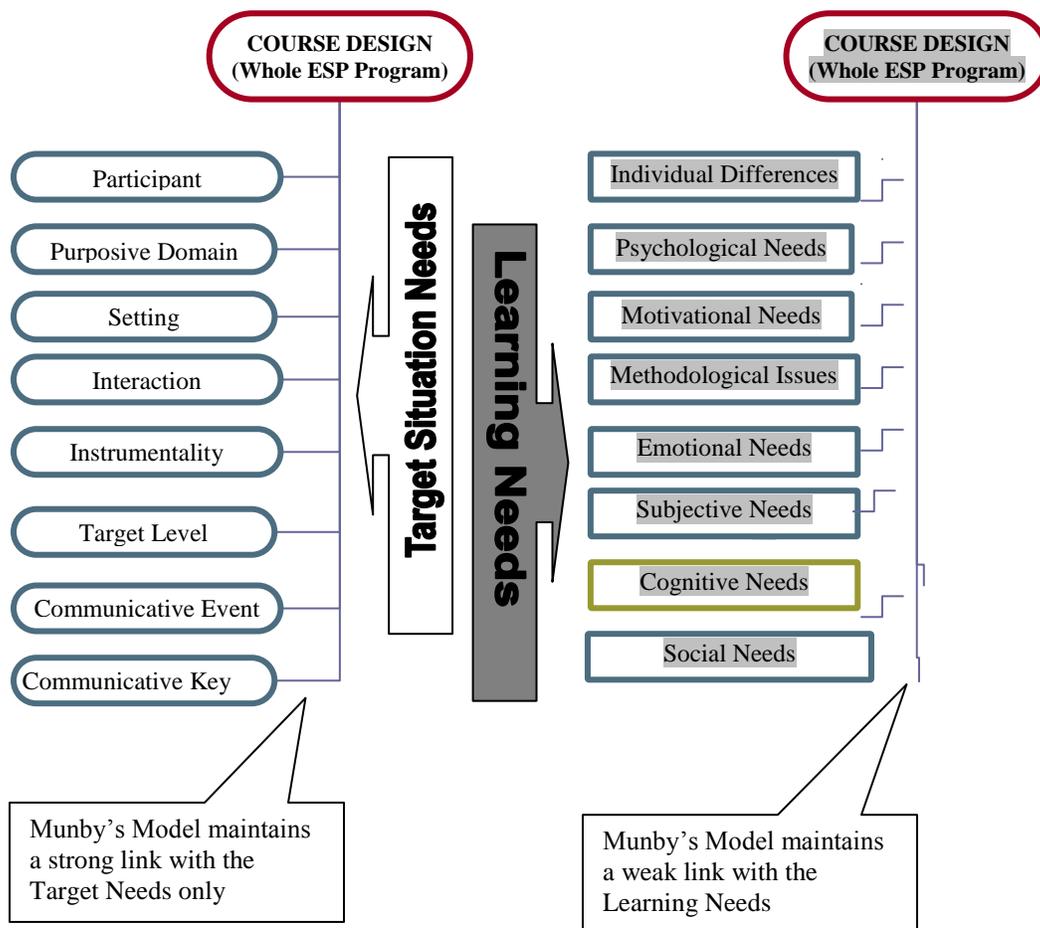
Fig.2. Critical analysis of Mumby's CNP model in perspective of learning needs

3.2. What needs we are serving: Where are the learning needs?

The problem stands that Munby presents a partial or one-dimensional aspect of needs analysis. This one-dimensional view does not address the *learning needs* of ESP learners. Munby's needs analysis has ignored the psychological needs of the learners. Hawkey (1980), though appears tolerant, analyses Munby's model from the course designer's perspective and feels that Munby's model clearly excludes the psycho, pedagogical and methodological needs of the learners. Here Munby has ignored the matter of individual differences, among the learners. The model does not deal with the considerations of the some important features of classroom life, such as individual learner's characteristics, resources, methodology etc. Munby's model being too mechanistic receives much criticism for paying too little attention to the perception of the learners.

Indeed the problem lies not in Munby's model of needs analysis but in the approach adopted for this design. This study deals with *this* approach towards needs analysis in ESP. Munby's model solely views the *target situation* needs and the entire needs analysis is based on merely target needs, though it is generally acknowledged as "a landmark in the development of needs analysis, and probably the best known framework for the target situation analysis" (Jordon, 1997, p. 22).

3.3. Motivational Needs and ESP: Need Hierarchy Theory

Motivation is a learning need for ESP learners. Motivation can be taken as the choice of activity itself plus the consistency and intensity with which one pursues the opted activity. Motivation is not directly observable and tangible phenomenon; it is rather inferred from an analysis of a stream of behaviors which are determined by both environmental and heredity factors and are observed through their effects on personality, beliefs, knowledge, abilities and skill (Muchinsky, 2000). In education psychology, the concept of self-motivation is very popular; however self-motivation is *encouraged*, as

believed many Humanists (e.g., Rogers, 1983) or *created*, as believed by behaviorist (e.g., Skinner, 1953) by the external motivational environment promoted by all the educational agents i.e. teachers, learners themselves, institution and all influencing sociological factors. According to Maslow, the source of motivation is certain needs i.e., both biological and psychological. These needs determine human behavior both at conscious and unconscious levels. Rather than looking at internal biological factors as the driving mechanism for the behavior, Maslow is much interested in the cognitive factors which push people towards certain forms of behavior (Gorman, 2004). Once a need is satisfied, it no longer dominates and another need rises to take its place. Maslow proposed five types of need, from basic to advance: physiological, safety, social, self-esteem, and self-actualization. Though there is criticism also on Maslow's need theory (e.g., Wahba & Bridwell, 1976), nevertheless the theory is very popular and regarded as the most fundamental discussion on motivation and human behavior. Motivation and psychological concerns are the fundamental learning needs of ESP learners. The motivation theory, hence, may be applied and exploited while developing a needs analysis for ESP program.

3.4. Implications of Need Hierarchy for ESP Program

The Need Hierarchy theory may perform its role in four directions at the needs analysis stage for an ESP program.

3.4.1. Role of safety needs in ESP program.

Safety needs include freedom from threat, danger and deprivation. ESP deals mainly with the adult learners who are well aware of their needs and incentives for which they are learning the second language. This might be a major issue for them whether the ESP program may increase their job safety. English language might be essential for their survival in the competitive job environment. Consequently, it ought to be a major concern what safety needs of the learners are attached with learning ESP course. This analysis with the other data will be helpful for the next stages of ESP program. The ESP course design and material selection, satisfying the safety needs of the learners, must incorporate the professional or occupational requirements of the learners and prioritize them according to their strength. The same

phenomenon can be applied in EAP as well. A student learning ESP to get through foreign studies and understand foreign books will expect from the ESP program to continue his or her survival in studies. Their survival needs in studies are attached with the successful completion of ESP program. Suppose, the course requires well-developed proficiency in reading comprehension; the ESP program must secure the reading capability rather than focusing on the development of speaking skill, though the latter is not to be ignored altogether. On the other hand, a medical representative, a student of EOP, will be much interested in developing speaking skill as an enhanced speaking ability will secure his or her job. This signifies the importance of analyzing the occupational safety needs in ESP program.

3.4.2.   Role of social needs in ESP program.

Social needs include the desire for association, belonging and companionship. The analysis of such needs is helpful to set the direction of an ESP course. Many business occupational or academic responsibilities demand the well-groomed and empathetic communication. These professional requirements create the social needs of association and belongingness. A learner is motivated if the syllabus designing, material selection and ESP classroom are satisfying such kinds of social needs. Similarly, a foreign student learning in an English speaking country, will need the satisfaction of social and relationship needs through the ESP program in which he or she participates. The learner expects a lot from EAP course in pursuing the needs of social communication. Likewise, an ESP teacher, well-aware of the social needs of the learners, can motivate them up to the exploration of their maximum potential by exploiting such methodologies, satisfying these needs.

3.4.3.   Role of self-esteem needs in ESP program.

Broadly speaking, self-esteem needs include self confidence, recognition, appreciation and the respect of one's peers. Satisfaction of these needs results in a sense of adequacy, their thwarting produces feelings of inferiority and helplessness (Muchinsky, 2000). It is very significant and helpful to analyze

these needs for an ESP classroom. Obviously, an ESP teacher can achieve better performance from a self-confident learner. Classroom appreciation and encouragement, the due recognition and acknowledgement of the learners' achievements may boost up their morale up to the full exploration of their potentials. Though Maslow argues and insists on the hierarchy of these needs and claims that the higher needs can become a source of motivation when the basic needs are first satisfied completely or the maximum. However, the critics also disagree and object Maslow's strict hierarchical division and believe that these needs may work simultaneously. It is not the inflexible hierarchical progression of needs that the second order need will emerge only when the lower rank need is completely satisfied.

3.4.4.   Role of self-actualization needs in ESP program.

Self-actualization is the realization of one's maximum potential. According to Maslow it is an urge to become more and more what one is and to become everything that one is capable of becoming. The ESP learners are the adult learners; usually belong to the already-educated class. Some of them certainly, if not all, are in the pursuit of their profession or academic excellence. There is no reason to deny that this highly ranked need may produce the wonderful effects on ESP program. They can be highly motivated by the sense of achievement which is a significant manifestation of self-actualization need. The ESP syllabus designing, material selection, ESP classroom and then evaluation and testing phase must be shaped in the perspective of self-actualization based needs analysis. Such analysis will categorize the two types of learners. Gorman (2004), though, discusses these categories in the context of sports and business fields, but same types can be identified in language learning class.

1.   Those who have the motive to achieve success.
2.   Those who have the motive to avoid failure.

The learners of first category those with a stronger motive to achieve success actively seek out challenges and persist for longer at them, strive for excellence in their performance, enjoy performing in front of

others and value their feedback. Unfortunately, the other category of learners, those with a strong motive to avoid failure is almost exactly the opposite. They avoid a challenge and choose either very easy opponent or a very hard one, dislike evaluation and feedback from others, and blame their failure on external factors.

The data collected after such analysis would really be worthwhile and workable for ESP class. It would unravel the psychological and moral domains of the learners. Of course, the learners with a weak desire for self-actualization and the learners with a strong desire of self-actualization will differ in their approach towards learning. Their behavior, attitude, enthusiasm, motivational standards, class participation and even their understanding level will vary.

3.5. Knowing Motivational (Learning) Needs Analysis: Need Hierarchy Theory

There are many possible questions for analyzing motivational needs of the ESP learners. The questions, however, do not deal with data collection and measurement tools. The required data may be gathered through different means e.g. questionnaires, interviews, observation, gathering text or informal consultation with sponsors, learners and others. The given questions deal with the main domains/ aspects on which we need data for analyzing motivational needs of the ESP learners.

Why are the learners taking the course?

- compulsory or optional

- apparent need or not

- statuses, money, promotion involved

How much do the learners value English language?

- increase the professional or academic excellence

- help the learners to promote their social relations

- take language as a need of the hour

How do they understand English language?

- as a tool of communication

- as a set of grammatical principles

- a skill development project

How can an ESP course affect their social life or working conditions?

- raise their status

- improve their belongingness

- make them more adjusted in the society or the working environment

How do the learners see an ESP classroom?

- expect a friendly environment and learner-centered place

- enjoy freedom of expression or prefer to be reserved

- visualize a strict traditional disciplined milieu

What incentives or rewards can motivate the learners?

- monetary

- social recognition

- equity and fairness

- self-respect

What are their views about an ESP teacher?

- a traditional figure dominating the classroom

- a friendly facilitator

- a mechanical figure concerned only with the teaching techniques not with the human behaviors

What kind of motive they do have?

- the motive to achieve success

- the motive to avoid failure

-        the motive to get through only

How much the learners are conscious of self-actualization?

-        they want to accept challenges or

-        they avoid challenges

-        they enjoy performing in front of others or

-        they feel shy

-        they are extrovert or

-        they are introvert

-        they are competitive or

-        they are passive

How much their basic needs are satisfied?

-        the social class they belong to

-        their educational and language learning problems

-        their expectation and fears from ESP programs

3.6. Conclusion

All this concludes that Need Hierarchy theory has many implications for ESP needs analysis which raise the significance of learning needs in overall ESP program. Notwithstanding, many issues remain to be discussed in this context. Whether such detailed and complicated analysis will be workable in practical setting? May it be wastage of time? Who will do it and how will it be done? Yet, how can the other work motivation theories which could not be discussed here be exploited in the ESP programs? It is further researchable how the precise, comprehensive and workable data could be collected for analyzing both target needs and learning needs. To come to the point, the learning needs ought to be given the right share in needs analysis framework for ESP learners. All the needs and purposes should be well-defined; the route of the journey of learning requires being quite evident, easy and enjoyable. Then only we can reach the maximum achievement point. Merely one-dimensional judgment may lead to the scanty

outcomes if not failure of ESP program. A lot of work is being done on motivational strategies in ESL, very particularly for the young learners. Then why not it is for the adult, mature professionals? ESP class is not a sermon house; the learners need motivational up-lifts and recreational satisfactions. Therefore, the need of the hour is a comprehensive needs analysis of the learners' needs which could involve the technical as well as psychological concerns of the learners. Certainly, all this is hindered by many socio-politico-economic constraints. We cannot manage the psychological differences of the learners in a single big-sized class. How would be the idea of one-person class? The idea is not bad but, obviously, not workable for the community. However, the inclusion of learning needs in needs analysis for ESP learners can be made workable and calls for only accurate deliberation. Perhaps the future ESP teacher will shift the emphasis from target needs to learning needs. We can work on all work motivation theories to reshape them in working conditions for the ESP program.

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