
ENGLISH LANGUAGE NEEDS OF UG AGRICULTURE STUDENTS FROM MAHARASHTRA SAUs

SARAP N.S.

Abstract: The need is the most important aspect; it investigates the accurate and thorough needs of the learners as expressed from their viewpoint. It is very important to start the course developing process with an analysis of the target group of students. Many problems arise in L2 (English as a second language) classes because the teachers do not pay proper attention to the learners' interests and do not go for feedback from the students, which is a source of essential information. With the spread of communicative language teaching, much emphasis on second language methodology has been paid to the learner-oriented instruction. If you have reasonably homogeneous group of learners and have to design an appropriate course for them, you might begin by looking for answers to a logically-sequenced set of questions. Hence, the present study embarks on the views of the B.Sc. Agriculture students from State Agricultural Universities (SAUs) in Maharashtra State pertaining to the English language needs vis-a-vis current English course material.

Keywords: Course Design, ESP, Integration of Motivation in ELT, Needs Assessment.

Introduction: Needs Assessment or Needs Analysis (NA) plays a very important role in both learning and teaching processes. In the former, it is crucial for the learners to offer their views regarding their needs in order to enable them finding out materials which would match their accurate needs as they are in the awareness stage where they can easily perceive their accurate needs (Sculthorp, 1974; and Altman and James, 1980). NA is generally regarded as a criterion of ESP (English for specific purposes), although, ESP is by no means the only educational enterprise, which makes use of it (Berwik, 1989; and Brindley, 1989). Nagarajan (1988) defines a learner's needs in terms of the reason for which the learner wishes to learn English and the kind of English he will have to use in future. These aspects are very important in an ESP course design.

Motivation: In the integration of the motivation of English language teaching, three levels of motivation to learn English are important. Level one, the highest level when English is required to obtain a degree of a desirable job or to get promotion. Level two, to improve examination grades or influence positively career prospects; and level three where English could increase the student's status, be useful if he goes abroad or to widen his knowledge and interests. This system of level also emphasises instrumental motivation (where English is seen as a means of achieving some practical or professional purposes) to be more important for success than integrative motivation (where the learner identifies with the social and cultural aspects of learning English). It is generally, assumed that ESP programmes by their nature tend to emphasize the instrumental aspect of learner's motivation (quoted in Kennedy and Bolitho, 1991).

ELT courses are taught in all Faculties at SAUs, but

these courses in the above mentioned institutions are considered as minor courses. However, students in all the faculties under SAUs need greater access to the English courses either as present needs (in-study) or future needs to pursue higher education or go for a professional career (Post -study).

Unfortunately, a majority of learners pay attention to specialized subjects and regard them as important contrast to the English courses, which are not considered essential. So they study English courses just to pass the examination. The situation is more or less similar in India too. Thus it could be said that, the motivation is not so high to learn the target language (Dharmapriya, 1988).

Methodology: The study was conducted at the eight agricultural colleges under all the four SAUs. From each university two colleges, one constituent and one private affiliated, were chosen. From each college fifty students were selected randomly. The questionnaire was the major instrument used in collecting data of this study. It is employed to collect information from the perspectives of the students regarding issues undertaken.

This study was conducted with the following specific objectives

1. To ascertain the extent of usefulness of the current English language course.
2. To find out the entire English language needs of the learners.
3. To seek the opinion of the students for improving their overall English proficiency.

Results, Discussion and Findings: As a preliminary step to examine the views of the students regarding their needs, they were asked whether they read English books/materials other than those, which they study in agriculture context. Actually there is a correlation between the item and the learners' needs.

The students, who responded positively, indicated that the current course did not meet their entire needs. Therefore, they try to improve their English proficiency through self-study in order to cope with the requirements of their studies. ESP learners often need in-house materials because textbooks are increasingly less self sufficient.

The students' responses are given below

- a. Yes (374) 93.50%
- b. No (026) 06.50%

If affirmative, what kind:

Books related to agriculture	59.00 per cent
Magazines	34.00 per cent
Novels	23.50 per cent
Newspapers	66.50 per cent
Other (please specify)	23.00 per cent

As expected, almost all the informants responded positively, they perceived well the importance of reading as a self-study device at this stage, where they need great access to supplementary materials, which might help them to overcome some difficulties of agricultural studies.

Some of the informants said that they practiced reading skill in more than one area. The above table confirms this fact. Just less than three-fifth (59.00 per cent) used to read books related to agriculture and nearly one-third (34.00 per cent) of the respondents went for magazines. Novels would read by less than one-fourth (23.50 per cent) and newspaper readers were found comparatively more i.e. nearly two-third (66.50 per cent). Other materials used to read by less than one-fourth (23.00 per cent) of the students, which include online materials, comics, literary works, poems, etc.

Reading is an active skill where the reader attempts to build up the meaning the writer had in mind when he wrote the text. Reading is a very important language skill. The students need to develop their strategies to reach the advanced stage if they have to follow successfully the science course programmes.

Sl. No.	Category (score)	Respondents (n= 322)	
		Frequency	Percentage
1.	To great extent (3)	178	55.27
2.	To somewhat extent (2)	100	31.07
3.	To limited extent (1)	044	13.66
	Average: 2.41	322	100.00
	Total		

The above table shows that more than half (55.27 per

The second item in the needs aspect was about preference of adding supplementary materials. Students were asked whether they prefer supplementary material to be added to present English course. The responses of the respondents are as under:

- a. Yes (338) 84.50%
- b. No (62) 15.50%
- c. If yes, which one do you prefer to add?

Agriculture related English material	49.50 per cent
General English material	35.50 per cent
Grammar	36.00 per cent
Other (specify)	10.00 per cent

An overwhelming majority of the informants (84.50 per cent) preferred to add supplementary material to the current English course. This group expressed the view that the English materials in use were inadequate and the utilization was not up to the mark. Therefore, they opted for addition of the supplementary materials in order to fill in the deficiency of the current materials.

Some students preferred to add more than one kind of material as they ticked more than one option, whereas other (10.00 per cent) preferred to add other material, opting for conversation. This group liked to improve their speaking ability, because it plays a very important role in real life communication. Those who opted for agriculture related English (49.50 per cent), general English material (35.50 per cent) and grammar (36.00 per cent) liked to have access to supplementary material.

The next question asked to the students on whether the present English course did meet their current academic needs. The students expressed their opinions as follows.

- a. Yes (322) 80.50%
- b. No (78) 19.50%

If yes, to what extent:

cent) students said that the current English course

met their current academic needs to a great extent, while just less than one-third (31.07 per cent) students said it was useful to somewhat extent and just for 13.66 per cent learners it was useful to a limited extent. The average score comes to 2.41. Hence, this course is, in a broad sense, useful for the students to meet their current academic needs.

The next question in this parameter was related to professional needs. In this regard, it was crucial to examine the materials in use with career needs, i.e. to what extent the English course material match the future professional needs of the learners.

The course content should be looked beyond the current needs of the learners (in-study), and professional needs (post-study) should also be taken into consideration.

Needs analysis therefore becomes a process of finding out, as much as possible, about the learners' current and future language usage. Hence, the question relevant to this aspect was put forth

Does the present English course satisfy your future professional needs?

a. Yes (350) 87.50%

b. No (50) 12.50%

If yes, to what extent:

Sl. No.	Category (score)	Respondents (n= 350)	
		Frequency	Percentage
1.	To great extent (3)	144	41.14
2.	To somewhat extent (2)	184	52.57
3.	To limited extent (1)	022	06.29
	Average: 2.35 Total	350	100.00

Table (iv) points out that more than two-fifth (41.14 per cent) students found the present English language course meeting their future professional needs to a great extents, while more than half (52.57 per cent) found it useful to somewhat extent and only 06.29 per cent student were of the opinion that this course did match their future professional needs to limited extent. The average score comes to 2.35. This

means that the present course definitely match the future professional needs of the learners.

The next question raised by the researcher whether the present English language course meet their entire i.e. academic, professional and social needs. The following table informs in this respect.

a. Yes (176) 44.00%

b. No (224) 56.00%

Sl. No.	Category (score)	Respondents (n= 176)	
		Frequency	Percentage
1.	To great extent (3)	37	21.03
2.	To somewhat extent (2)	91	51.70
3.	To limited extent (1)	48	27.27
	Average: 1.94 Total	176	100.00

Table (v) points out that just more than one-fifth (21.03 per cent) students found the present English language course meeting their entire needs to great extents, while more than half (51.70 per cent) found it useful to somewhat extent and more than one-fourth (27.27 per cent) student were of the opinion that this course did match their future professional needs to limited extent. The average score comes to 1.94. This means that the present course has a fair scope for improving to match the entire needs of the learners.

The present English language course is treated as non credit course i.e. the scores of English language

subject are not included in the final transcript (mark sheet). The students were asked whether this course be treated as a credit course. The replies of the students are given below.

a. Yes (296) 74.00%

b. No (104) 26.00%

Thus, this is visibly indicates that just less than three-fourth (74.00 per cent) of the students were in favour of treating this course as a credit course. The students expressed their concern about not to treating this important course as a credit course.

The last question of the questionnaire schedule was

to seek the opinions of the learners to improve their language skills according to their comprehensive English language needs i.e. academic, occupational

and social. The responses of the respondents are given in the following table.

Sl. No.	Suggestions	Respondents (n=400)	
		Frequency	Percentage
1.	Lay more emphasis on speaking skills	350	87.50
2.	Inclusion of Grammar	262	65.50
3.	Inclusion of vocabulary exercises	242	60.50
4.	Inclusion of agriculture related text	222	55.50
5.	Lay more emphasis on listening skills	192	48.00
6.	Inclusion of general English	190	47.50
7.	Lay emphasis on writing skills	160	40.00
8.	Lay emphasis on reading skills	134	33.50

The above table shows that the majority of the students (87.50 per cent) expressed the need of giving emphasis on the speaking skills. Just less than two-third (65.50 per cent) of the learners wanted to lay prominence on grammar. Just more than three-fifth (60.50 per cent) of the learners expressed the need of including vocabulary exercises in the syllabus. More than half (55.50 per cent) of the students said that they would like the emphasis be given on including agriculture related text, while just less than half (47.50 per cent) students emphasized on inclusion of general English text (literary component) in the syllabus. Just less than half (48.00 per cent) of the respondents wanted to lay focus on listening skills and two-fifth (40.00 per cent) wanted emphasizing the writing skills, while nearly one-third (33.50 per cent) wanted reading skills be given importance. This shows that there is an urgent need to improve the syllabus according to the responses of the learners for improving their entire English language needs.

Conclusions: It can be concluded that the present English language course meets the academic and professional needs but doesn't meet the situational (entire) needs of the students. There is a prospect of redesigning course contents and also, to introducing structural elements to the course.

Recommendations/implications:

1. There is a need give students supplementary material to read for improving their overall proficiency in English.
2. There is a fair scope for making changes to the course contents by giving due emphasis on language skills.
3. Some topics to be included in the present course to meet the situational (social) needs of the students.
4. Taking into consideration the needs of B.Sc. Agriculture students, one more structural course may be introduced to the curricula of the degree course.

References:

1. Austin, D. and Crosfield T. (1994). Foreign Language Teaching Meeting Individual Needs. Oxford, Pergamon Press Ltd.
2. Berwik, R and Brindley G. (1989). "Needs Assessment in Language Programming, From Theory to Practice", in Johnsons (Eds). The Second Language Curriculum, 48-62, Cambridge University Press, London.
3. Dharmpriya, A.T. (1977). "ESP in Sri Lanka: A Perspective", in Chamberlain, D. and Baumgardner R.J. (eds.) *ESP in Classroom: Practice and Evaluation, ELT Document 123*. pp 1. Modern English Publications in Association with the British Council, London.
4. Dudley-Evans, T and Mj. St. John (1998). Development in ESP, A Multidisciplinary Approach. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
5. Gamal, M.A.A. (2005). Needs of ESP Learners For Practical English Communication: A Case Study of First Year Students at the Medical College, University of Aden. Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, University of Pune.
6. Kennedy, K and Bolitho P (1991). English for Specific Purposes, Macmillan Press Ltd, Basingstoke.
7. Lounfors, P. (1987). "Needs Analysis Project for the Lag Person": Paper given at the 6th European Symposium on LSP, Vaasa, Finland 3-7 August, 1987 levedon Avon: Multilingual Matters.
8. Munby, J. (1978). Communicative Syllabus Design, Cambridge University Press, London.

-
9. Nagarajan, K. (1988). Evolving an ESP Course for the First Year Undergraduates of Computer Science. Unpublished M.Phil. Dissertation, Department of English, University of Pune, India.
 10. Nunan, D. (2001). Aspects of Task-Based Syllabus Design. The English Centre, University of Hong Kong, December 2001 PP:1
 11. Richterich, R. and Chancerel, J.I. (1980). Identify the Needs of Adults Learning a Foreign Language, Pergamon Press Ltd, Oxford.
 12. Sculthorp, M.A.L. (1974). "Intensive Courses: Towards a Strategy for Teaching," in Perren, G. (ed.) (1974) Teaching Language to Adults for Special Purposes (CILT Reports and Papers No. II). CILT.

Sarap N.S/Assistant Professor of English/
College of Agriculture/ Dapoli/Dist: Ratnagiri 415712. (M.S.)