NEEDS ANALYSIS OF BANGLADESHI ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS AT A TERTIARY CLASSROOM

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Abstract:

Teaching is a challenging profession and in pedagogy, the educators very often face difficulties dealing with the problems of the learners. The teachers are facing challenges to face the situations. Then they usually address their own solutions to overcome the situations. But to do it successfully one can implement the Needs- based Analysis that will focus on the specific learning strategy and help the educators overcome the difficulties in a learning environment. A Needs Analysis (NA) refers to a family of procedures for gathering information about learners and about communicative tasks for use in syllabus design in an academic context (Ronald V. White 1998). As the learner's priority is given the goal of achieving communicative competence is served authentically by adopting a NA. This paper aims at the certain points important to construct a NA for the learners of the Advanced level, usually targeted at the university level students of Bangladesh. First, it will show the basic needs the tertiary learners of Bangladesh face in acquiring the second language and then it emphasizes on the findings and finally it shows how to implement some of the probable steps in a teaching-learning context. It also focuses on the limitations while preparing a NA. The samples are taken from the students of Honors and Masters, of different semesters studying at IER (Institute of Education and Research) and one of the private universities (East West University). For all of them English is the Target Language. Simple Random Sampling technique was followed to carry on the research and data was collected from close interviews and questionnaires. It is a qualitative approach to find out the needs of the learners.

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1. Introduction

In our tertiary language classroom, the learners come from different cultural and social background. While teaching them it is found that they are having different sort of needs. It is evident that being a diversified language classroom the language teacher needs to know these very carefully and find out what should be the remedial process for assisting them. It is also true that, if the language teacher could diagnose the needs the interventions could be given appropriately. This research was done to find out the specific language needs of the learners at the tertiary level in a Bangladeshi context. Data was collected from questionnaire and interview. Rather data were analyzed according to several categories to identify their needs. Data were also collected from pre language testing before starting the questionnaire. A number of total 81 students participated in the survey.

The Needs Analysis (NA) was an attention of the early 1970s (Cited from Ronald V. White1998) which was first carried out by Michael West while he was serving in Bangladesh and later the results of his work had been published in 1926 where he proposed two main ways to assist the children with low language achievement. Later,this approach was expounded in *A Model for the Definition of Language Needs of Adults Learning a Modern Language* by Rene Richterich in 1972 and in *Identifying the needs of adults learning a foreign language* by Richterich and Chancerel in 1977-1980. The second book focused on understanding meaning rather than structure to adapt a language syllabus.

Later the notional-functional approach also focused on the needs analysis by showing a link between a language code and language use (R. V. White, 1998). It explained that if the focus is given more on language code the needs of the learners would be ignored in a language classroom. Interestingly, the functional approach was indicating on the needs of learners by manifesting the idea that the needs of the language learners could never be determined by the language content; rather it is possible by exploring the language code among the users.

In 1966, Del Hymes worked on it by outlining descriptive categories of identifying language learners' needs where it is told that the purpose of any language use is thus important thing to consider identifying the needs of the target learner groups. Also, Bell (1981) suggested a design of a training program where he showed a relationship between the trainers' needs and language learners' needs.

Finally, it was determined that three questions are important to identify the needs of the L2 learners in a language classroom by asking the following as;

- Who is the target group for language learning?
- Where are we teaching them?
- When are we teaching them?

As it is a common trend in adult learners that they want to learn rapidly than others (Richterich and Wilkins, 1975) we can take help from surveys to find out their objective needs in the classroom

Though it is difficult to analyze the needs of all the learners, here I tried to focus on the majority part of learners who responded to the study. Moreover, it was conducted before the course as it aimed at focusing on analyzing the learners' needs before starting a course.

2. Methodology

2.1 Participants

The participants were selected from two universities of Bangladesh, one is the best public university (Dhaka University) and another private university that ranked the top (East West University). The number of total population was from the Dhaka University= 110 and from the East West University= 90. A total of 110+90=200. All of them were in the tertiary level and their age range is between 19 and 21. Their cultural background was almost same.

2.3 Instruments

Data were collected through closed questionnaire and interviews. The questions were prepared focusing on the learners' linguistic, societal and educational competence.

2.4 Procedure

The students were given the questionnaire and they answered them. Interviews were taken from the students too. The students were chosen from the language education department who were undertaking the basic communication and composition skill courses. The data were collected for six months and was controlled by the researcher as the variables such as the language instructor was same for the learners in both the situation and the course taught were also the same. In both cases, the data were taken before starting the course. It was done purposively as it was necessary to define their needs before starting the course and assessing how it went.

2.5 Data Analysis

After analyzing the data some needs are found and these are discussed below;

A. Speaking is the most difficult area

It is found that the learners are inhibited to using the speaking skill mostly. At least 90% students responded that they face difficulty while speaking. The need is mostly on speaking and ability to using this skill. Their next problem is with writing. Though in Bangladesh the learners of early level are' mostly having difficulty in reading whereas the tertiary level learners are having problem with speaking and writing.

B. Most comfortable language

Mostly responded (87%) that it is their mother tongue (Bengali) that they are comfortable with to use even in higher studies and in learning contexts. Though they agree that English should be used in the higher studies but they have difficulties to comprehend while using the Target Language (TL) in their regular studies. So they preferred the mother tongue in their language use.

C. Correcting errors

The next important need that is focused from the data is the issue of correcting errors in the language classroom. About 85% of the population reported that they expect the language teacher to correct their errors but to do it they suggested that they expect the educator to use positive reinforcement and feedback for them. Moreover, it was also found that the remaining 15% who did not want to correct the errors were having the feeling of inhibition in front of their teachers. This number is found as 'struggling learners' who are slow in developing their language skills and they needed continuous assistance from the L2 teacher.

D. Need of positive feedback

It was clearly found from the data that about 82% learners needed positive feedback to developing their language skills. In fact, they are strongly recommending that when they receive feedback they feel more confident than the time when they do not. They also reported that the positive feedback helps them to overcome their difficulties sometimes during the semester and they do better performance at the end of the semester with this feedback ensured.

E. Lack of scope to using the L2 outside the classroom

It was evident from the data that about 80% learners could not use their target language outside the language classroom in Bangladesh. It was same with the best public and private university from where the samples were collected. In both the cases, the learners informed that they get little or no scope to use the L2 outside the classroom and very few students could use it only with their friends but the number is very limited.

F. Unable to comprehend meaning of the text

The learners of the tertiary level of Bangladesh are mostly unable to comprehend the meaning of the text. It is found that 70% of the total population is unable to comprehend the meaning of text and their main problem is that they cannot produce what they have received. About 20% responded that they have lacking in understanding subject verb agreement and the 10% learners reported that they have deficiency in recognizing grammatical categories such as tense, parts of speech etc.

G. Mixed method is appreciated

Equally, 70% learners responded to the question regarding using the media of language for acquiring the second language in the classroom and all of them reported that it is their mother tongue (Bengali) that is more accepted and they face extreme difficulty to understand the instructions used by the language teacher in the classroom. Around 10% learners reported that they need to expose to the target language in the classroom to develop their listening skill. The rest of the learners did not comment.

H. Grammatical questions are preferable than the creative one

Multiple Choice Questions based on grammatical categories are found to be more popular with the tertiary learners of Bangladesh than the creative writings. In most cases, the students told that they are not confident in writing creative questions as they think they lack the reasoning, use of arguments into writing, use of critical thinking and thus they prefer M.C.Q. that to the creative parts of a test. About 65% learners feel confident in M.C.Q. whereas 25% students are competent in creative writing session or analytical questions reflecting their reasoning.

I. Group work is appreciated

In both the cases, the students responded mostly to group work as their activity inside the classroom. The 65% learners are comfortable with group work and about 25% learners advocated for pair work and the rest is for individual works. Students pointed that they can get motivation from group works if assigned.

J. Defining their Needs based on Maslow

There was a question on defining the learners' primary needs if fulfilled or not during their childhood days. It was found that in most of the cases, as in the public and in the private university, the needs were fulfilled. 80% students responded that they think their needs were fulfilled. The learners were almost of the same cultural background but it was also found that few of the learners from the public university background were found to be dissatisfied regarding their needs as 20% learners of the Public university background reported that their needs such as education, food and affection-these were not fulfilled during their childhood days and they still feel the same need important for their upbringing and also acquiring something specially a new language.

While interviewing these 20% learners, it is found that their family were mostly broken, or separated or they were living under extreme poverty level during their childhood.

K. Use of multimedia and digital tools

It is a matter of surprise to analyze the data that about 65% students do not think that they need multimedia or digital tools to understand the text or use the L2. Rather they responded that they prefer written texts, papers, notes than to digital tools in the language classroom. 20% responded that it is teacher's lecture that they prefer to understand the meaning of the text. The remaining 15% student emphasizes on using the digital tools for the L2 classroom.

3. Recommendations of the study based on the data analysis

A. Bilingual classroom is advocated

From the data, it is evident that the tertiary learners of Bangladesh are having serious problem in the language classroom with the target language. Their main need is to know the instructions in their mother tongue. In interviews, they reported that they do not want the whole class into their mother tongue but they want a mixture of both the L1 and L2. They are advocating the instructor to conduct the class using both the languages.

B. Meaning of text should be interpreted

While comprehending meaning, the learners fail to understand the meaning of the text. It is suggested to interpret the meaning while reading or delivering lecture in the classroom. But for this, the tertiary learners want to understand the meaning in their own language. It is taken as a challenge for the instructors of L2 who do not want to continue the class by using the mother tongue. So it is found to be a prominent need to be fulfilled for the learners. Some students reported that they could not understand the grammatical items whereas few reported that they could not understand the context of any text they are given. So before starting the lesson the instructor is supposed to give the learners idea on the selected text by giving examples, drills, presenting posters and related images.

C. Two types of needs are focused in the study

From this study, it is found that the tertiary learners are having two kinds of need specially; these are- linguistic and societal. When they responded to the point that they are unable to comprehend, to understand the subject verb agreement use, and another need is societal when few of them believe that some of their primary needs were not fulfilled in childhood and that affect their academic life resulted in lack of confidence, fear of acceptance etc.

D. Introducing digital learning to be global in education

To overcome their inhibition in using digital tools inside the language classroom, the facilitator should introduce them in a real life situation where the tertiary learners will able to understand how to operate these tools, how to get best from these and finally how to be aware of the negative aspects of technology too. Few students informed while interviewing that they need proper guidance to get introduced with the tools. They also reported that it depends on the teacher how well he is prepared to using these. For example, sometimes teachers with less experience start the course with irrelevant things that reduce interest among them to study.

E. Building relationship with teacher

In most of the cases, the students informed that they are not able to inform the teacher that they face difficulty in comprehending meaning though they informed that they are not inhibited to them. Proper counseling could be helpful to assist these learners for those who are introverted and slow in learning.

F. Planning a different lesson for the struggling learners

A number of students were found as 'struggling learners' who responded that they were unable to comprehend the meaning, reproduce the text and sometimes failed to understand the instructions given by the teacher. The number of this learners is few but these number should not be ignored. Different kind of lesson plan could be implemented where they will be given extra time, volunteer tutoring or self-motivational counseling from the teacher.

G. Positive feedback should be sustainable

About 95% learners responded that positive feedback assists them into understanding difficult text, building better analytical ability and trying to perform better throughout the semester. They also reported that sometimes positive attitude of the instructor make them more confident in using the skills into a L2 classroom and thus breaks the inhibition to speak into that language.

H. Students' performance should be recorded regularly

It is recommended that a language teacher can keep a record of all the students of his/her class to assess the linguistic competence in a given time. It will focus on the formative and summative assessment of each learner where they will regularly write about their needs and expectations from the learning atmosphere. Privacy could be maintained to get a better result. When one student will get poor grade in one exam, the instructor can give feedback and then can see whether it helps to develop the overall performance of that learner or not.

3.1 Limitation of the study

The most significant limitation of this study was the data was not taken from the teacher's perspective. It only discussed the students' perceptions from interviews and closed questionnaire. Further study could be conducted aligning the teachers' and learners' opinions and more variables could be analyzed here. Another limitation is, there is no or very little attention given to the slow or struggling learners of tertiary level in Bangladesh. The reasons are found that, this number is ignored due to time constraint and sometimes size of the classroom. Such as, in the public university the number of the student in per class is 55 which is a large class and teacher cannot pay attention to the struggling learners most of the time. Their need is not assessed properly.

4. Conclusion

The needs analysis is a trial to focus on the importance of making a frame for the learners of the tertiary level in Bangladesh. The students were not taken from the same cultural background to observe the differences in their needs. But interestingly, though they are separated culturally (as the learners from the public university are mostly middle-class and those from the private university are mostly upper class), their basic needs are same. It emphasizes on some important issues as the tertiary learners' needs are somehow very close to each context. Finally, it is suggested that, this kind of needs based analysis will closely examine the problems of the learners and also will advocate some of the needful solutions to take to increase the rate of literacy among the adult learners of a country.

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