**Needs Analysis (Needs Assessment)**

**2.1 Definition**

Needs analysis refers to the activities of gathering information that will serve as the basis for developing a curriculum/syllabus that will meet learning needs of a particular group of students. It involves the gathering of information to find out how much the students already know and what they need to learn. Once identified, needs can be stated in terms of objectives which can serve as the basis for developing materials, teaching activities and tests.

Richards, Platt and Weber (1985, p. 189) define NA as “the process of determining the needs for which a learner or group of learners requires a language and arranging the needs according to priorities. Needs assessment makes use of both subjective and objective information”.

Needs analysis “is the systematic collection and analysis of all subjective and objective information necessary to define and validate defensible curriculum purposes that satisfied the language learning requirements of the student within the context of particular institutions that influence the learning and teaching situations”. (Brown, 1995, p. 36).

**2.2 Making Decisions:** before any NA can take place, curriculum planners make certain fundamental decisions:

* + 1. **Those involved in the NA**

1. **The Target Group:** those about whom information will be gathered, usually the students but sometimes the teachers and/or administrators.
2. **The audience:** those who will be required to act upon the analysis: teachers, administrators and any governing bodies in the bureaucracy.
3. **The Needs Analysts:** those responsible for conducting the NA: members of the faculty designed for the job or consultants brought in for a purpose.
4. **The Resource Group:** those who may serve as sources of information about the target group: parents, future employers or teachers from other subjects (in ESP)
   * 1. **Philosophies of NA (types of information will be gathered)**

Stufflebean (1977 cited in Stufflebean et, 1985) has identified four philosophies that can arise in NA:

* **The Discrepancy Philosophy:** needs are viewed as differences or discrepancies between a designed performance for the students and what they are actually doing. This philosophy involved gathering detailed information about what is needed to change in students’ performances based on the observed difference between designed performance and the one the students are producing instead.
* **Democratic Philosophy:** a need is defined as any change that is desired by the majority of the group involved. This philosophy leads to a NA that would gather information about the learning most desired by the chosen group(s).
* **The Analytic Philosophy**: a need is whether the students will naturally learn next based on what is known about them and the learning processes involved. This philosophy might lead to a survey of the existing literature on SLA in search of the hierarchical steps involved in the language learning processes.
* **The Diagnostic Philosophy:** a need is anything that would prove harmful if it was missing. This philosophy might lead to an analysis of the important language skills necessary for a group of learners.
  + 1. **Types of Needs**
  1. **Situation Needs vs. Language Needs**
* Situation needs are needs related to any administrative, financial, logistical, manpower, pedagogic or other factors that might have an impact on the programme.
* Language needs are target linguistic behaviours that the learners must alternately acquire, i.e. details about circumstances in which language will be used, the dimensions of language competence involved, the learners reasons for study the language and the present abilities with respect to those reasons.
  1. **Objective Needs vs. Subjective Needs**
* Objective needs are needs gathered from observable data about the situation, the learners, the language that the students must eventually acquire and the present proficiency level.
* Subjective needs are wants, desires and expectations.
  1. **Linguistic Content vs. Learning Processes**
* The linguistic content refers to the needs analysed objectively from a language needs perspectives and spelled out in linguistic terms: phonemes, morphemes, grammatical structures, notions, functions, etc.
* Learning processes are needs specified from a situation needs perspective; they tend to be more subjectively analysed needs in the effective domain, such as motivation and self-esteem.
  + 1. **Gathering Information (how they are gathered?)**

1. **Types of Questions:** in the process of gathering information, different types of questions have been discussed. Rosset (1982) identifies five categories of questions:

* **Problems**: the purpose of these questions is to identify the problems that are experienced by the people under assessment in the target group.
* **Priorities**: questions of priorities can be asked any of the resources group to find out which topics language skills are considered most essential for the target group to learn.
* **Abilities**: usually are used to determine the abilities of students at entry and are answered by using pre-tests results.
* Attitude questions: are created to uncover information about participants’ feelings and attitudes towards an element of the course.
* **Solutions**: this type of questions elicits ideas for solutions to perceived problems in terms of what changes might bring about compromise and/or soluyions.

**b. Types of Instruments**

* **Existing Information:** existing information can include data sources such as files or records that may be on hand when the needs analysis begins.
* **Tests:** are indispensable source of information in a needs analysis. Whether the purpose of measurement is proficiency placement, diagnosis or achievement, tests can provide a wealth of information about:
* The general ability levels of the students
* Specific problems that students may be having with the language
* Their achievement in previous courses
* Possible ability groupings necessary for a course.
* **Observation:** it usually involves watching an individual or a group of individuals and recording the behaviours that occur.
* **Interview**: its procedures are fairly open-ended type of instrument. Interview may best be used to explore what issues and questions should be persuade in a follow up instrument using more structured procedures such as questionnaires.
* **Questionnaires**: they are more efficient for gathering information on a large scale than are many of the other procedures discussed above.