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## The role of needs analysis in effective Business English course design

Mirzaakhmedova Makhliyo Yuldashevna<sup>2</sup>

[tsul77777@gmail.com](mailto:tsul77777@gmail.com)

Senior Lecturer,  
Banking and Finance Academy of  
the Republic of Uzbekistan

**Annotation** *This article explores the role of needs analysis in designing effective Business English courses by examining students' current skills and target professional requirements. Using many data collection methods – such as surveys, interviews, focus groups, observations, and self-assessment forms – the study identifies both quantitative and qualitative insights. The findings reveal diverse learner profiles, varying proficiency levels, and affective factors such as motivation, confidence, and willingness to participate in communicative tasks, highlighting the need for flexible, learner-centered instruction. Target needs focus on workplace tasks like emails, reports, presentations, negotiations, and cross-cultural communication, while learning preferences emphasize practical, job-related activities and adaptable learning modes. Overall, the article demonstrates that authentic, task-based, and contextually relevant teaching strategies are essential for bridging the gap between learners' current abilities and the linguistic competencies required for effective professional performance. In addition, the results suggest that continuous needs analysis should be an ongoing process rather than a one-time stage, allowing courses to adapt to evolving professional demands. Incorporating learner feedback, workplace simulations, and digital tools further enhances relevance and engagement. Such an approach supports sustainable skill development and prepares learners to respond effectively to real-world business communication challenges.*

**Keywords** *Needs analysis, target needs, learning needs, necessities, lacks, wants, quantitative, qualitative*

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## Роль «needs analysis» в эффективном проектировании курса делового английского языка

Мирзаахмедова Махлиё Юлдашевна

[tsul77777@gmail.com](mailto:tsul77777@gmail.com)

Старший преподаватель,  
Академия банковского дела и финансов  
Республики Узбекистан

**Аннотация** *В данной статье исследуется роль Needs Analysis в проектировании эффективных курсов делового английского языка через анализ текущих навыков студентов и целевых профессиональных требований. В исследовании использовались различные методы сбора данных – опросы, интервью, фокус-группы, наблюдения и формы самооценки – что позволило выявить как количественные, так и качественные данные. Результаты показывают разнообразие профилей учащихся, различие уровней владения языком и аффективные факторы, такие как мотивация, уверенность в себе и готовность участвовать в коммуникативных заданиях, что*

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<sup>2</sup> Mirzaakhmedova M.Yu. — ORCID: 0000-0001-7158-3686

подчеркивает необходимость гибкого, ориентированного на учащегося обучения. Целевые потребности ориентированы на рабочие задачи, такие как электронные письма, отчеты, презентации, переговоры и межкультурная коммуникация, в то время как предпочтения в обучении акцентируют внимание на практических, связанных с работой заданиях и адаптивных формах обучения. В целом, статья демонстрирует, что использование аутентичных, задачно-ориентированных и контекстуально релевантных стратегий преподавания является ключевым для преодоления разрыва между текущими способностями студентов и языковыми компетенциями, необходимыми для эффективной профессиональной деятельности.

**Ключевые слова** Needs analysis, целевые потребности, учебные потребности необходимость недостатки, желания, количественный, качественный

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## Samarali biznes ingliz tili kursini loyihalashda “needs analysis” ning roli

Mirzaaxmedova Maxliyo Yo'ldashevna  
[tsul77777@gmail.com](mailto:tsul77777@gmail.com)  
Katta o'qituvchi,  
O'zbekiston Respublikasi Bank-moliya akademiyasi

**Annotatsiya** Ushbu maqola samarali Biznes Ingliz tili kurslarini loyihalashda Needs Analysisning rolini o'rganadi, bunda talabalarning hozirgi ko'nikmalari va maqsadli professional talablar tahlil qilinadi. Tadqiqot turli ma'lumot to'plash usullaridan foydalangan – so'rovnomalar, intervyular, fokus-guruhlar, kuzatuvlar va o'z-o'zini baholash shakllari orqali – va miqdoriy hamda sifatli natijalarni aniqlaydi. Topilmalar turli o'quvchi profillarini, malaka darajalari farqliligini va motivatsiya, ishonch, kommunikativ vazifalarda ishtirok etishga tayyorlik kabi affektiv omillarni ko'rsatadi, bu esa moslashuvchan, o'quvchi markazli ta'lim zarurligini ta'kidlaydi. Maqsadli talablar ish joyidagi vazifalarga, masalan, elektron pochta yozish, hisobot tayyorlash, taqdimotlar, muzokaralar va madaniyatlararo kommunikatsiyaga qaratilgan bo'lsa, o'rganish afzalliklari amaliy, ishga doir faoliyat va moslashuvchan o'quv shakllarini ta'kidlaydi. Umuman olganda, maqola haqiqiy, vazifaga asoslangan va kontekstga mos o'qitish strategiyalari talabalarning hozirgi ko'nikmalari bilan samarali professional faoliyat uchun talab qilinadigan lingvistik kompetensiyalar o'rtasidagi bo'shliqni to'ldirishda muhim ekanligini ko'rsatadi. Bundan tashqari, natijalar ehtiyojlar tahlili bir martalik bosqich emas, balki doimiy jarayon bo'lishi zarurligini ko'rsatadi, chunki kasbiy talablar muntazam ravishda o'zgarib boradi. Talabalar fikrini inobatga olish, ish joyi modellashtirilgan vaziyatlar va raqamli vositalardan foydalanish ta'limning dolzarbligi va samaradorligini oshiradi. Ushbu yondashuv barqaror til ko'nikmalarini shakllantirishga xizmat qiladi.

**Kalit so'zlar** Needs analysis, maqsadiy talablar, o'rganish talablari, zaruratlar, yetishmovchiliklar, istaklar, miqdoriy, sifatli

## Introduction

ESP is designed to prepare students to use English in various academic settings and fields, such as economics, politics, medicine, and engineering. To create an effective course design in the field of English for Specific Purposes (ESP), Needs Analysis (NA) plays a critical role. It is widely acknowledged that there is a significant diversity between Business English learners and general English learners. The business environment often requires the use of language related to economic, financial, and business terminology during workplace tasks, negotiations, and product descriptions. For this reason, the syllabus for a Business English course should be designed systematically based on the analysis of learners' real communicative needs.

What is a Needs Analysis? It is a planned procedure of gathering and measuring information about language demands of learners, their preferable ways of learning, and real-life situations in their workplace. Moreover, the needs analysis involves doing some sort of activity with a learner to determine what their learning needs are. This may be the most crucial aspect of curriculum development and teaching English for Specific Purposes (ESP). Choosing appropriate materials for students based on their needs is crucial for ESP lecturers or course designers. In this context, an effective Needs Analysis allows lecturers and course designers to formulate a conceptual framework for an ESP course, with a precise focus on students' learning needs and targeted requirements.

## Literature review

Numerous scientific works and articles have examined needs analysis and its main role in course design. In the following paragraph, the viewpoints of some authors on Needs Analysis will be highlighted thoroughly.

Graves (2000; 98) considers needs analysis to be "a systematic and ongoing process of gathering information about

students' needs and preferences, interpreting the information, and then making course decisions based on the interpretation in order to meet the needs". As a result, a course design will be more useful and engaging for students.

Hyland (2006; 73) presents that needs analysis can be understood as a comprehensive, and a complete, layered framework approach. He claims that: "Needs analysis is a set of techniques used to collect and evaluate data for course design; It is the method or way of determining how a course will be conducted and what content it will include. Needs analysis is an ongoing process through which teachers can modify their teaching as they learn more about their students, thereby also assessing the effectiveness of the course. Needs is an umbrella term that embraces many aspects, incorporating learners' goals and backgrounds, their language proficiencies, their reasons for taking the course, their teaching and learning preferences, and the situations they will need to communicate in. Needs can involve what learners know, do not know or want to know, and can be collected and analyzed in a variety of ways". I agree that learners' needs are multifaceted, including their goals, backgrounds, language skills, motivations, and learning preferences. Understanding what learners know, what they want to learn, and the real workplace situations in which they will use the language support teachers create relevant and effective instruction. Collecting and analyzing needs in different ways ensures learning is personalized and meaningful, supporting both engagement and progress.

Robinson (1991; 7) claims that needs "are perhaps more appropriately described as objectives" to be achieved. It is imperative that students should know and understand the functional, structural, and lexical elements commonly used in specific situations. From a pedagogical perspective, such needs may be

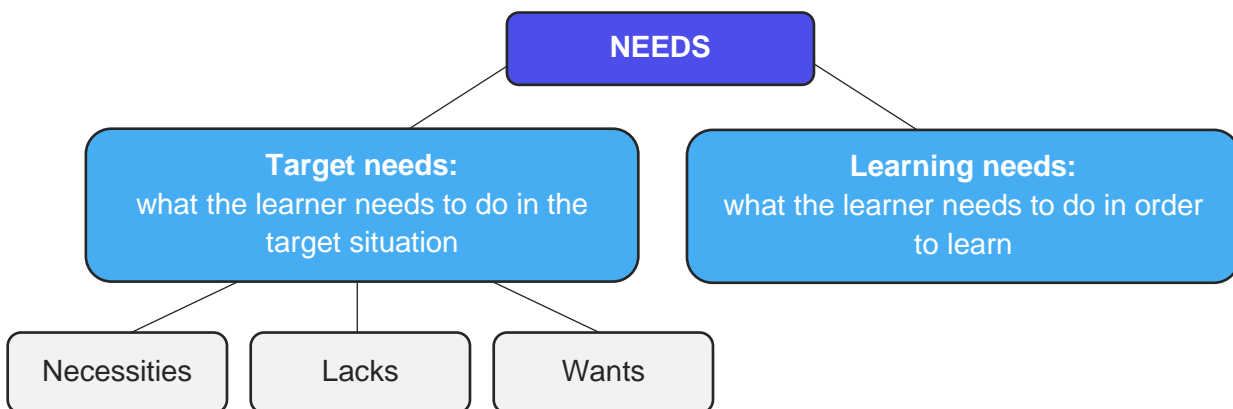
more accurately centralized as learning objectives. Consequently, students have to understand specific features of communicative situations in order to perform successfully in target professional contexts.

According to Akhmadalieva, (2022; 130) all facilities are created for students to acquire the English language, and teachers are in charge of developing students' language skills in high level. For mastering language deeply, nowadays, in the area of teaching the role of communicative competence is significant, because the presence of communicative competence determines the effectiveness of the students in conveying any information, appropriate vocabulary, proper choice of

language tools in their place, as well as in the process of communication with other people. Carrying out a needs analysis is important for enhancing students' communicative competence, supporting access to relevant vocabulary, and guiding the proper choice of tools and teaching appropriate resources.

Needs analysis involves two essential distinctions: **target need** (what needs to be done in the target situation) and **learning need** (what learners need to do to learn). They are significant indicators to determine learners' needs. Hutchinson and Waters (1987) propose a needs analysis classification.

**Hutchinson & Waters' (1987) Classification of Needs Analysis**



**Scheme 1.** Hutchinson & Waters' Classification of Needs Analysis

Target needs indicates that what learners are obliged to do to convey ideas clearly in the specific context. According to Hutchinson and Waters (1987) target needs are mainly relevant to "what the learner needs to do in the target situation". In practice, the term target needs include several important distinctions. It consists of three components: **necessities, lacks, and wants.**

Nation and Macalister (2010; 25) explain briefly that **necessities** fit into required knowledge, **lacks** relate to present knowledge and **wants** fit into subjective needs. The concept "**Necessities**" is an important component to identify the aspects of an ESP curriculum that students need. **Necessities** are the academic or occupational requirements

that learners must gain in a proficient manner in the target situation. In needs analysis, **necessities** represent the target objectives; they indicate what learners can do at the end of the English course.

**Lacks** represent the language ability and learners' prior knowledge. They also indicate that learners' weak points are to acquire demanded standard. Lacks are what the learners already know and what they are deficient in. Subsequently, lacks are the gaps between the initial or actual situation of the learners in terms of language proficiency or aptitudes, and the one which is required after the accomplishment of the language training. To determine the lacks, teachers look at the language proficiency they have already

achieved. Having a clear idea will allow lecturers to assess how far they need to go to fulfill the above requirements. Teachers or course designers can estimate how well students understand a question based on the data collected from the pre-set questionnaire. When the instructor observes the most common mistakes (lacks), it is possible to determine the type of material that should be used to help the students learn correct English (necessities). Sometimes, even though students' ideas are clear, they cannot properly express them due to their lack of fluency in English. It is therefore necessary to match the target proficiency with the existing proficiency of the learners. In this case, the gap can be referred to as the learner's lacks.

Allwright (1982) claims that "**wants**" are the skills which a student considers relevant to themselves. **Wants** are the personal aims that learners like to get from the language course. They reflect learners' personal expectations and hope towards acquiring English from the language course. Usually, these needs are very personal; therefore, they are sometimes called "subjective". I agree with Allwright's (1982) perspective that **wants** reflect learners' personal goals and expectations from a language course. Recognizing these subjective needs is important, as they can influence motivation and engagement, even if they do not always align directly with the target or essential skills required.

In fact, these wants are very real and may conflict with the necessities as perceived by the employer. Therefore, ways must be found to accommodate them. In this respect, individuals' wants cannot all be accounted for; however, the wants of the majority can be discussed and partially met.

The opinions of learners and related opinions must be considered and analyzed. Richterich and Chancerel (1980; 29), comment "... a need does not exist independent of a person. It is people who build their images of their needs on the basis of data relating to themselves and their environment." The

scholars highlight that needs are personal and contextual rather than absolute. Learners therefore play an active role in defining their own needs. Effective education requires listening to learners and understanding how they perceive their learning situation. Therefore, the course designers should take into account the learners' opinions, also known as their "wants".

**Learning needs** indicate that knowledge, skills, abilities, and competences that learners demand to achieve their learning goals successfully within a particular context. Researchers have looked at **target needs** and **learning needs** as well as **necessities**, **lacks**, and **wants** when designing an English course for lawyers, doctors, engineers, or technical and business students. Learning needs show how the students will be able to move from the starting point (lacks) to the ultimate goal (necessities). Xiao (2007; 2), defines the learning needs as: "Factors that affect the learning like attitude, motivation, awareness, personality, learning styles and strategies, together with the social background". For example, learners may be highly motivated by the subject matter or their professional goals, yet may lose interest when teaching materials are outdated, overly lengthy, or insufficiently engaging.

Hutchinson and Waters (1987) emphasize the importance of Needs Analysis that course design should not be based only on the target objectives (what learners are expected to do at the end of a course). They added that the target situation alone is not a reliable indicator, they mean that simply identifying what learners need to do in the future (for example, using language at work or in academic contexts) does not guarantee effective learning. Knowing the end goals does not automatically show how learners will reach them. They argue that greater importance should be given to the learning situation, that includes *learners' existing knowledge and skills, the strategies they use to learn, their motivation and attitudes, the learning setting (classroom context, resources, institutional constraints), and*

the available time for learning. They also state that if learning process is enjoyable, fulfilling, manageable, and generative, the learning will motivate learners, provide them a sense of achievement, be realistic in terms of workload and encourage further learning beyond the classroom. As a result, they conclude that a shift from a product-oriented view of education (focusing only on what learners know at the end) to a process-oriented view (focusing on how learners learn).

After the learners' needs are precisely defined, the ESP course designer can move on to the next stage, that is a syllabus design. Munby (1978; 40) points out that "syllabus specification in ESP can only take place after the prior and necessary work has been done on needs." Course designers need to analyze the learners' learning needs according to their motivation, the conditions of the learning situation, and their existing knowledge and skills.

ESP is an approach to learning English, which is based on the learners' needs. Students from different specialties face difficulties with all four aspects of language, namely listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Research has shown that students struggle to understand lectures and speeches delivered in English. They are hesitant to speak English in class. Further, their reading skills are very poor. When they try to write, they encounter numerous challenges. One of the major reasons why they cannot efficiently deal with the language is their lack of language knowledge. Thus, it is essential to analyze the target needs and learning needs of a specific group of learners to solve their problems.

### **Methodology section**

To collect data for the analysis, multiple instruments are essential, including surveys or questionnaires, interviews, focus groups, observations of workplace-related tasks, and learner self-assessment forms. In order to obtain information about students' language proficiency, semi-structured interview questions were prepared and group-work

activities were organized. One group of students assumed the role of a panel of experts, while the remaining students acted as applicants for various job vacancies. During this activity, students' responses, interactional strategies, and overall language proficiency were systematically observed. This task provided valuable data and insights that informed the subsequent design of the module curriculum and syllabus. Moreover, the use of this activity contributed to the reliability and validity of the needs analysis by allowing language performance to be evaluated in an authentic and task-based context.

The findings revealed both quantitative and qualitative insights into students' learning needs and gaps between their current skills and target professional requirements. Quantitative data from the questionnaires indicated that 50% of the students reported significant difficulty with business writing, particularly in producing formal emails, reports, and structured written communication. In contrast, qualitative data obtained from interviews and open-ended questionnaire responses provided deeper insights into learners' perceptions and expectations. Many students expressed a strong desire for increased practice in oral communication tasks, such as presentations, meetings, and negotiations, preferably situated in real-life business scenarios. These qualitative findings suggest that while students recognize weaknesses in their written business communication, they also perceive spoken professional interaction as a critical target need for their future careers. Overall, the results highlight a clear gap between students' current language skills – especially in business writing and communicative fluency – and the linguistic competencies required for effective performance in authentic business contexts.

### **Analysis and results: Learner profile**

The results show that students at Banking and Finance Academy come from diverse educational backgrounds and are employed in various professional fields, including banking, taxation, international notary firms, and other

sectors. Their ages range from 22 to 40, and most have pre-intermediate to intermediate English proficiency. As teachers and course designers conducting a needs analysis, it is essential to consider how students use English in their professional contexts, including the frequency and the degree of language use. These factors highlight a gap between workplace language demands and students' prior learning experiences, underscoring the need for a targeted and contextually relevant Business English course.

### **Target needs**

The findings reveal that students studying at the Banking and Finance Academy, who are also employed in various organizations, are required to perform a variety of tasks in the workplace, such as writing emails, preparing business plans, negotiating, participating in meetings, setting agendas, and taking minutes. For instance, students working in the banking sector often encounter situations that require both formal and informal communication, as well as cross-cultural correspondence. In these contexts, relevant language skills – such as business writing, report writing, presentation skills, and teleconferencing – are essential. Identifying these workplace demands provides guidance on how the course should be designed to effectively meet students' professional needs.

### **Learning needs**

The results indicate that students experience diverse learning contexts, including online, face-to-face, and blended learning environments. Additionally, many participants reported a preference for evening classes due to their compatibility with personal and professional commitments. Beyond learning modes, students' motivation and attitudes toward learning Business English emerged as significant factors influencing their learning process. While some learners demonstrated high levels of self-confidence, others reported feeling shy or reluctant to participate in pair or group activities, particularly teamwork-based tasks. These findings suggest that affective

factors should be carefully considered in course design.

Moreover, the analysis revealed notable gaps in students' existing language knowledge, particularly in grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and business-related terminology. The data show that mixed proficiency levels within the same class pose instructional challenges for teachers, especially in the development of appropriate learning materials. For example, while some students exhibited strong pronunciation skills, others demonstrated limited vocabulary or insufficient grammatical competence to construct accurate sentences. These findings highlight the importance of conducting a systematic needs analysis to identify learners' language use, learning needs, and preferences in order to design instruction that is relevant, learnable, and engaging.

### **Conclusion**

This article focused on identifying the learning and target needs of Business English learners through a systematic needs analysis. The findings indicate that students participate in a variety of learning contexts, including online, face-to-face, blended, and evening classes, all of which influence their engagement and learning preferences. In addition to these contextual factors, affective variables such as motivation, confidence, and willingness to participate in communicative activities were found to have a substantial impact on learners' language development. The analysis of target needs showed that students require Business English skills to use during job interviews, workplace communication, and collaborative tasks. In terms of necessities, grammatical accuracy, sufficient vocabulary, clear pronunciation, and familiarity with business-related terminology were identified as essential competencies. However, the findings also revealed several gaps in learners' current abilities, such as limited lexical resources, weak grammatical control, inconsistent pronunciation, and hesitation to engage in group or teamwork-based activities.

Simultaneously, learners showed their preference for practical, job-related tasks, flexible ways of learning, and activities that reflect real-life professional communication. Overall, the results confirm that Business English learners have different proficiency levels and learning preferences, highlighting the importance of designing a learner-centered, flexible course that addresses both linguistic and affective needs through authentic, task-based instruction.

### Recommendations

Based on the findings of this needs analysis, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. *Curriculum and Syllabus Design.* The Business English curriculum should be designed around learners' target needs, with a strong emphasis on real-world professional tasks.
2. *Differentiated Instruction.* Given the mixed proficiency levels observed among learners, differentiated instructional strategies should be employed. Teachers should provide tiered tasks, supplementary materials, and optional support activities to address varying levels of grammatical competence, lexical knowledge, and pronunciation skills.
3. *Task-Based and Communicative Activities.* Task-based learning activities, including

role-plays and simulations, should be incorporated regularly to enhance learners' communicative competence and confidence.

4. *Support for Affective Factors.* To address issues related to confidence and participation, course designers and instructors should create a supportive and low anxiety learning environment. Pair and small-group work, clear task instructions, and positive feedback can encourage shy or less confident learners to participate more actively.
5. *Flexible Learning Modes.* Considering students' preferences for online, blended, and evening classes, flexible delivery modes should be maintained where possible. Providing online resources, recorded materials, and self-study options can support learners with time constraints and differing learning preferences.
6. *Ongoing Needs Analysis and Evaluation.* Needs analysis should be viewed as an ongoing process rather than a one-time activity. Continuous assessment through classroom observation, learner feedback, and performance-based tasks is recommended to ensure that the course remains relevant, learnable, and engaging.

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