



Learner Corpora Research and the Needs Analysis in the Classroom of the Foreign Language

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ABSTRACT: This paper explores the intersection of learner corpus research (LCR) and needs analysis (NA) within the context of foreign language education. While LCR provides empirical insights into how learners actually use language, NA clarifies their academic, professional, and social requirements. Drawing on examples from ESP and Italian L2 classrooms, the paper argues that integrating these two approaches supports the design of curricula that are both evidence-based and learner-centred. It further highlights international case studies from Saudi Arabia, Taiwan, and Montenegro, illustrating how corpus-informed teaching and systematic needs analysis work in synergy to improve learning outcomes.

KEYWORDS: Needs Analysis for Language Teaching, Corpus Linguistics, Foreign Language Teaching.

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Introduction

In recent decades, learner corpus research (LCR) and needs analysis (NA) have become central to innovations in foreign language teaching. LCR, rooted in corpus linguistics, allows educators to examine authentic learner output and identify recurrent linguistic patterns (Gilquin, Granger, & Paquot, 2007; Reppen, 2010). On the other hand, NA examines learners' necessities, lacks, and wants, ensuring that teaching goals align with professional, academic, and social demands (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987; Nation & Macalister, 2010). This paper aims to demonstrate the complementary relationship between LCR and NA, using international case studies to highlight their pedagogical impact.

Theoretical Background

LCR stems from corpus linguistics and emphasises the use of empirical data to investigate authentic learner language. Through approaches such as data-driven learning (DDL), learners can observe linguistic patterns and independently refine their language skills (Boulton & Thomas, 2012). Parallel to this, NA has played a crucial role in English for Specific Purposes (ESP), with Hutchinson and Waters' (1987) framework distinguishing necessities, lacks, and wants as the foundation for curriculum design. The integration of LCR and NA thus provides a combination of quantitative and qualitative evidence that supports more effective and context-sensitive instruction.

Corpus Linguistics in Language Education

Corpus-based instruction has been successfully applied in multiple educational contexts. In Saudi Arabia, the use of online corpus tools enabled students to reduce errors in academic vocabulary (Flowerdew, 2012). In Taiwan, students actively engaged in constructing learner corpora, which enhanced their metalinguistic awareness and critical language reflection. Furthermore, mobile-assisted learning applications in Iran and Lebanon have incorporated corpus-informed tutors, showing that corpus-based pedagogies can also adapt to digital and mobile contexts (Tribble, 2012). These examples demonstrate the potential of corpora to enhance vocabulary development, grammatical accuracy, and discourse competence.

Needs Analysis and Case Studies

Needs analysis (NA) remains a cornerstone of effective ESP course design, ensuring that instruction is deeply aligned with learners' actual requirements. In the context of ESP, NA helps to identify not just linguistic gaps but also the specific communicative tasks learners must master (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987; Belcher, 2006). For example, Liu and Zhang (2020) proposed an NA framework for a short ESP course targeting Chinese bank tellers, detailing appropriate data collection methods (e.g., observation protocols, triangulation) and demonstrating how analytic transparency enhances relevance and applicability in professional contexts. Furthermore, Alsamadani's (2017) study of Saudi engineering students offered quantitative and qualitative insights. Using observations, questionnaires, and interviews, it revealed that while receptive skills such as reading and listening were commonly emphasised in ESP classes, productive abilities—particularly writing and speaking—were identified by both students and ESP teachers as more

urgently needed for their academic and professional pursuits. This finding underscores the importance of triangulating multiple data sources to capture a nuanced understanding of learner needs.

Another illustrative case concerns applying the ADDIE model (Analysis, Design, Development, Implementation, Evaluation) to develop Oral Business English (OBE) curricula for Chinese EFL undergraduates majoring in business. Hu (2024) administered structured surveys during the ANALYSIS phase, revealing learners' low confidence in speaking and a preference for interactive methods such as presentations, discussions, and role-play—insights that directly informed module design.

Moreover, García-Ponce (2021) carried out focus groups with institutional stakeholders—teachers, students, and administrators—at a university in Mexico, finding value in combining top-down strategic planning with content-based instruction to enhance alignment with academic and career objectives.

These diverse examples—from technical professions, banking, business, to higher education—span quantitative surveys, qualitative interviews, classroom observation, and stakeholder discussions. This variety mirrors the broader methodological landscape: mixed-methods designs in NA are increasingly recognised for their ability to triangulate data, enrich validity, and support adaptive curriculum development (Park, 2021).

- Key methodological takeaways from these case studies include:
1. Triangulation of multiple methods ensures a deeper understanding of needs.
 2. Context-specific adaptation highlights differences across disciplines and cultures.
 3. Practical application shows how findings directly inform curriculum design.
 4. Emerging frameworks stress flexible and scalable models tailored to diverse contexts.

Synergies and Challenges

The integration of LCR and NA offers a strong foundation for curriculum development. Corpus-informed syllabi prioritise high-frequency lexical and grammatical features, while NA ensures that these selections remain aligned with learners' communicative goals. Evidence from Uzbek and Indonesian contexts suggests that this combined approach enhances learner engagement, task relevance, and skill transfer. However, challenges remain. Teachers often lack sufficient training in corpus tools, and existing corpora may not always represent learners' target domains. Meanwhile, NA can be resource-intensive and culturally sensitive. Addressing these challenges requires investment in teacher training, digital infrastructure, and localised corpus resources.

Conclusion

In conclusion, LCR and NA represent two complementary perspectives on language learning. While LCR demonstrates how learners actually use language, NA clarifies what they need to learn. Their integration supports learner-centred, evidence-based instruction that can adapt to changing contexts. Despite implementation challenges, adopting a cyclical approach—where needs are periodically reassessed and corpus data are continuously refreshed—ensures the sustained relevance

of language curricula. Future research should investigate scalable models for integrating LCR and NA, particularly in under-resourced educational environments.

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