

A Preliminary Needs Analysis for Takaoka National College's English Program

Christopher R. Covey

(Received, July 1, 1996)

ABSTRACT

This paper will begin by discussing the importance of identifying detailed educational objectives in order to insure the relevance of instruction; in this context, the rationale behind our program's general objectives will be explained. The preliminary outline of a Needs Analysis to identify extremely specific program goals, thereby improving the effectiveness and relevance of our curriculum, will be elaborated upon. The initial drafts of the questionnaires and their intended survey populations will then be described. Finally, the conclusion will summarize the goals of the proposed research in addition to suggesting how the results of the research might be applied to improve the existing curriculum.

KEY WORDS

Needs Analysis, Close-ended questionnaire, open-ended questionnaire, descriptive survey research

1 The Importance of Educational Objectives

A careful rethinking of the objectives of an instructional program is often the sine qua non of successful educational reform--whether on the course, or the program level. In too many instances, the important questions--about course or program purpose and rationale--never get asked at all, to the detriment of students and their prospective employers.

For example, the importance of establishing clearly articulated instructional

objectives has been confirmed in two recent American studies that compared the G.P.A. (grade point average) of college graduates with their subsequent on-the-job performance. In two major studies, there was little or no correlation between student G.P.A.'s and whether or not they were successful later in their careers. The conclusions seem to suggest that either the educational objectives or the testing methodologies being used in many US. universities are misguided.

What can we learn from this? The most poignant lesson is that perhaps

many college instructors do not spend enough time analyzing what really needs to be taught. The use of needs analysis to identify weaknesses in existing curricula appears to be an expedient that academics in most disciplines should not ignore. In any event, it seems likely that the adaptation and integration of new educational media, such as CD ROM based Computer Assisted Instruction, will help broaden the instructional choices available in many situations.

Effective use of new technology, however, requires careful planning, with particular attention paid to the learning styles of the students, financial constraints limiting the purchase of equipment, and the teaching methodology proposed. In this context, difficult decisions need to be made in order to determine the appropriate course of action. A well-conducted Needs Analysis may help to plan this transition.

Before spending lots of money and committing ourselves to specific software authoring systems or programs, it would be a good idea to determine what our student's learning preferences would be.

2 The Objectives of the English for Business Program

To begin with, we should identify the broad objectives of the program; we have reached the conclusion that the overall objectives of the English program fall into two basic categories: vocational training, and enrichment.

First, our program hopes to provide students with English language training that enhances their ability to meaningfully

use English at their future places of employment. The status of English as the international lingua franca of international business has been widely recognized for some time now. Recently, however, there seems to be a growing consensus--at least in other Asian countries--that the importance of English for international business has been increasing due to the integration of global markets and the rise of the internet. Therefore, in this changing context of international business, it is essential for us to continue to identify how our students could be asked to use their knowledge of English. That's one reason why we need to survey businesses that have hired, or may hire our students.

In regard to this objective, it is important to determine exactly what minimum level of proficiency is useful in business, and whether this level of proficiency can be realistically attained by our students during the two year course of their studies. Once a measurement tool--in the form of a standardized test--has been selected, it probably should be administered regularly in order to measure and verify student progress in mastering general English competency. We need to establish which entry level test to use and how often it should be administered to measure student progress.

Standardized tests, such as TOEIC, EIKEN, etc., can give us general guidelines, but it may be more important and relevant to decide which test is the most widely accepted in business. In the future, by adopting and using the most widely accepted English proficiency test,

we would be able to give the prospective employers of our students a fairly accurate idea of each of our students proficiency in English.

Second, we hope to provide students with a level of English proficiency that intellectually enriches by introducing them to foreign cultures and new ways of thinking. Another aspect of the enrichment goal is to introduce our students to the concept of life-long learning, teaching them how to use their knowledge of English to continuously gain access to information about subjects that are of great inherent interest to them; in this way, they can lead broader, more fulfilling lives than many of their monolingual peers. It might be desirable to go to great lengths to teach our students about the connection between English education, self-study skills and life-long learning. I suspect that our students, like most people, tend to see education as a terminal process that ends upon graduation from college, not a continual lifelong process. Hopefully, the needs analysis will shed some light upon how these interrelated issues should be dealt with in the context of curricular reform.

Regardless of how we decide to integrate this into the curriculum, it is important to teach students techniques that they can use to verify their own progress or mastery of whatever they decide to study through English. Being able to confidently assess their own progress in trying to understand, for example, a popular English movie, might be crucial in maintaining the interest-level necessary to sustain a life-long

enrichment effort.

For example, David Gardner, an instructor at the University of Hong Kong, teaches his students how to use the locally available bilingual English-Chinese resources to find things of great inherent interest to study, and evaluate their own comprehension of their chosen topic/subject of study. This could involve studying an English movie with Chinese subtitles, or watching a bilingual newscast in English, followed by an identical broadcast in Chinese to check comprehension.

3 Rationales for Survey Research

When considering the types of data gathering at our disposal, it was easy to reach the conclusion that a written survey of selected companies was the best option to collect data on the potential future employers, and actual past employers of our graduates. With the exception of a couple of questions, we have constructed closed-ended, multiple choice questionnaires that will require a minimum amount of time and effort on the part of the respondents, thereby increasing our chances of attaining a high rate of return from the selected companies. To the extent that it is possible, we will attempt to establish telephone contact with the personnel department of the respective companies in order to enlist their support in completing the questionnaires. To increase the likelihood of achieving statistically accurate data, we will try to get a total of at least 30 respondents from each group surveyed.

The purpose of the employer survey is

to compare a sample of the companies that have employed our graduates in the past, with a selected group of mid-to-large sized companies that have not yet employed any of our graduates, but have strong presences in overseas markets. We hope to be able to determine the following things:

- 1) How important do the companies in each survey group perceive English education to be?
- 2) In situations where English education has been deemed important by the management of a firm, what level of English proficiency is considered necessary to perform different job-related tasks or missions?
- 3) What standardized tests (TOEIC, EIKEN, etc.) are currently being used to determine employee proficiency levels in English?
- 4) In situations where English education has been deemed unimportant by the management of a firm, determine why the firm has decided upon such a policy.

For the purpose of collecting data from our students, we also selected the written survey format. Since the purpose of the first student survey is to gather data on very predictable issues requiring superficial responses, we felt that an open-ended format was also appropriate

here. However, an open-ended questionnaire was adapted for the second student survey, primarily because of the need to obtain more detailed answers.

The first student survey is intended to assist us in choosing appropriate Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) software and properly integrate it into our instructional program. Upon completion of the Voice of America CD ROM later this year, we should be able to permit students to use our software, as well as several demo programs from commercial software companies. Student reaction to the software will help us to take into account the learning styles and preferences of our students in regards to the instructional adaptation of CALL programs.

The second student survey serves to give us the opportunity to investigate our students attitudes about life-long learning and its relationship to further study of English after they graduate. It also gives students the opportunity to reflect on the strengths and weaknesses of our present curriculum. As stated earlier, it is an open ended survey that allows respondents to give more detailed answers.

4 Preliminary Drafts of the Written Survey Questionnaires

4.1 Employer Survey

EMPLOYERS SURVEY	
Instructions: Please read the questions carefully and check the most appropriate answer.	
Questions	Answers
(1) Does your business require staff that have some degree of English proficiency?	() Yes () No

<p>(2) What kind of tasks require the use of English in your routine business?</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Clerical tasks that basically require the ability to read standardized forms or documents and write simple, but grammatically correct responses in English.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> The ability to interact with English-speaking foreign visitors using verbal English skills to explain the products or services that your company offers.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> The ability to conduct business trips to English speaking countries.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Translation of difficult technical documents.</p>
<p>(3) Does your company have, or plan to establish and English training program to support your international business activities?</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes, we have an English training program. It has been in operation since _____.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> No, we do not have an English training program at this time, and do not plan to establish one in the future.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> No, we do not have an English training program, but have definite plans to start one in the near future.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> No, we don't have a training program yet, but would like to start one at some time in the future.</p>
<p>(4) If the English proficiency of your employees is of concern to you, which standardized test do you administer to monitor the English proficiency of your staff members?</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> The EIKEN</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> TOEIC</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Another test (please specify)</p> <p>_____</p>
<p>(5) If you are currently using the TOEIC test to measure your staff member's proficiency, what TOEIC scores do you consider appropriate for the following purposes?</p>	<p>Performing clerical tasks that basically require the ability to read standardized forms or documents and write simple, but grammatically correct responses in English. _____</p> <p>Interacting with English-speaking foreign visitors using verbal English skills to explain the products or services that your company offers.</p> <p>_____</p> <p>Conducting business trips to English speaking countries.</p> <p>_____</p> <p>Translating difficult technical documents. _____</p>

<p>(6) If you are currently using a test other than the TOEIC to measure your staff member's proficiency, what scores do you consider appropriate for the following purposes?</p>	<p>Name of test being used: _____</p> <p>Performing clerical tasks that basically require the ability to read standardized forms or documents and write simple, but grammatically correct responses in English. _____</p> <p>Interacting with English-speaking foreign visitors using verbal English skills to explain the products or services that your company offers. _____</p> <p>Conducting business trips to English speaking countries. _____</p> <p>Translating difficult technical documents. _____</p>
<p>(7) If you answered "No" to the previous question, why do you feel that an English training program is unnecessary?</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> We feel that our future business activities are likely to become more focused upon the domestic Japanese market. Therefore, encouraging our staff members to become proficient in foreign languages is not necessary.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> We have decided to train our staff in a foreign language other than English (please specify the language) _____.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> None of the above (please explain) _____.</p>
<p>(8) If you answered "Yes" to question 3, or indicated some interest in establishing an English training program, what skills would you like your staff members to have?</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Basic Communicative skill</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> The Ability to Translate Written Documents</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Debate or Negotiation Skills</p>

4.2 Student Survey #1

STUDENT SURVEY # 1	
(To be given to students that participate in trials of various Computer Assisted Language Learning authoring programs/lessons.)	
Instructions: Please read the questions carefully and check the most appropriate answer.	

Questions	Answers
(1) In my opinion, this software program/lesson was extremely easy to understand how to use.	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Agree <input type="checkbox"/> Agree <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree <input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Disagree
(2) I feel that this software program/lesson would be an effective learning tool.	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Agree <input type="checkbox"/> Agree <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree <input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Disagree
(3) I enjoyed using this software program/lesson, and would probably use it between classes if a computer was available.	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Agree <input type="checkbox"/> Agree <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree <input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Disagree
(4) I feel that this Computer Assisted Language Learning program/lesson provided me with more feedback and/or personalized instruction than a typical classroom lesson.	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Agree <input type="checkbox"/> Agree <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree <input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Disagree
(5) If you have any specific comments about this program/lesson, please write them here:	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>

4.3 Student Survey #2

STUDENT SURVEY #2	
(To be given to 2nd year students just prior to graduation.)	
Instructions: Please answer in as much detail as possible	
Questions	Answers
(1) Do you plan to continue studying English after graduation? Why or Why not?	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>

(2) If you answered yes to question 1, how do you plan to continue with your studies?	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
(3) Please describe the strengths of Takaoka Tandai's English for Business curriculum.	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
(4) Please describe the weaknesses of our English for Business curriculum.	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
(5) Please tell us how you think that we might be able to improve our curriculum.	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>

5 Conducting the Surveys and Analyzing the Data

What we are setting out to do is basically a descriptive research study carried out by using both open-ended and close-ended questionnaires. In descriptive survey research, the design of appropriate questionnaires is by far the most difficult task. Therefore to try to ensure that things go smoothly, once the final drafts of all of the questionnaires have been completed, the questionnaires will be translated into Japanese, and a pilot survey will be conducted; hopefully, this will ensure that the survey questions are easily understandable, unambiguous, and

user-friendly in every way possible.

When we are satisfied with questionnaire design and presentation, we can begin to assign numerical values to all of the possible responses to the closed-ended questions. The data produced can be analyzed using a variety of basic statistical techniques, including: frequency counts, percentage, mean, standard deviation from the mean, etc. We may also decide to use more advanced techniques, such as a Pareto Analysis. In all likelihood, the final selection of statistical techniques will not be clear until the pilot test of the surveys has been conducted.

6 Conclusion

We hope that this needs analysis will help to identify weaknesses in our curriculum, which might lead to the creation of new courses, or the modification of existing courses in order to address those shortcomings. We also hope that the surveys will shed some light on the current state of English education within Japanese companies, and illuminate present trends towards the utilization of language skills in international business situations involving Japanese multinational companies.

It is hoped that the student surveys will help us to more clearly identify the most popular CALL software/authoring programs, as well as logical instructional uses for them. As Dr. Frank Berlich of the Tsukuba University of Library and

Information Science pointed out in a recent presentation, the current state of Computer Assisted Language Learning software leaves a lot to be desired. Too often, there appears to be large differences between educator-designed CALL programs and programmer-designed CALL. The former tends to produce programs that provide rich feedback to student users, but often have primitive, visually unappealing interfaces that sometimes confuse or bore the user. The latter tends to offer students attractive interfaces and a lot of special effects, but fail to provide the student with adequate feedback on their errors. When making decisions on which software to purchase, our survey research will hopefully have provided us with valuable information about the kinds of interface and levels of feedback preferred by our students.

References

1. Gardner, David "Self-Assessment for Self-Access Learners" TESOL Journal, Vol. 5, No. 3, Spring 1996. Pgs 18-23.
2. Egge, Korene, "Teaching ESL Writing" (a book review of a book by Reid, J, Englewood, Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall Regents, Pp. 354) TESOL Journal, Vol 5, No. 3, Pp 39-40.
3. Briggs, Leslie J., Gustafson, Kent L., and Tillman, Murray H. *Instructional Design: Principles and Applications*. 2nd Edition. Educational Technology Publications, 1990.
4. Ehrmann, Stephan, C. "Asking the Right Question: What Does Research Tell Us About Technology and Higher Learning."
[WWW document]
URL <http://www2.ido.gmu.edu/AAHE/Change/March/Ehrmann>.
5. McCarty, Steven. "Revalorizing General Education And TEFL In Japan" [WWW document] http://leahi.kcc.hawaii.edu/org/tcc_conf/mccarty.html
6. Numrich, Carol "Bringing 'self' and 'study' back into self-study." TESOL Matters June/July 1996. Pg 21.

7. Leshin, C., Pollock, J., Reigeluth, C.M., "*Instructional Design, Strategies and Tactics*" Educational Technology Publications, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1994.
8. Gay, L.R. "*Educational Research: Competencies for Analysis and Application*" Macmillan Publishing Co., 1992
9. Slavin, Robert E., "Research Methods in Education" Allyn and Bacon, 1992.
10. Berbich, Frank, Ph.D. "Computer Adaptive Testing and its Extension to a Teaching Model in CALL" [WWW document]
URL <http://sol.ipc94.ulis.ac.jp:9090/~frank/CATT.html>
11. Berbich, Frank, Ph.D. "CALL: Its Scope and Limits"
[WWW document from the Internet TESL Journal]
URL: <http://aitech.ac.jp/~iteslj/>

“本学英語教育のためのニーズ・アナリシス試案”

クリストファー R. コビー

(平成8年7月1日受理)

要 旨

本稿ではまず、学生に対する教育指導の妥当性を確保するためには詳細な教育目標の明確化が重要であることを論じ、本学英語教育の概括的目標の根拠となる考え方について述べる。そのうえで、本学英語カリキュラムの有効性及び妥当性の改善のためのきわめて具体的な指導計画を明らかにするニーズ・アナリシス試案の概略について詳述し、さらに調査項目の粗案と予定調査対象について述べる。最後に、この調査の結果がカリキュラム改善にどのように適用可能かを含めてこの研究の狙いを要約する。

キーワード

教育目標, ……………(8語)

ニーズ, アナリシス, 閉鎖質問項目, 自由記述質問項目, 記述的調査研究