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Needs Analysis in a Japanese EFL Context: Utilizing Triangulation Techniques

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Abstract

This paper describes a needs analysis of the listening component of an EAP (English for academic purposes) program in a Japanese university's English department. After the original needs analysis—which included the triangulated use of questionnaires, interviews, and focus groups—changes were introduced to the program partially based on the results. A rationale is presented for the necessity of conducting periodic needs analysis studies in order to offer language instruction that responds to changes in the learning environment, in students' attitudes and needs, in teachers' perceptions of students, and in the teachers' uptake of program directives. Through the needs analysis, we sought to clarify the specific needs of our student population in order to lay the groundwork for truly informed change. It is hoped that this study can inform other EAP programs, particularly in EFL contexts. In our conclusion, we caution that it is naive to expect that needs which are revealed through a needs analysis can suggest, in and of themselves, a desirable direction and a concrete blueprint for change, despite the broad portrait that triangulated methods paint. Constructive changes are more likely to arise when the action researcher has close contact with the clients and knowledge of emerging trends. Needs analysis is best conducted in collaboration with practitioners and approached as a dynamic process, taking into account affective factors and the interplay between perceptions and actions arising from them.

I. Introduction

1. *Needs analysis studies conducted in EFL settings*

When developing or revising a language curriculum, the importance of investigating learners' needs is discussed in the literature of curriculum development for general language teaching (Brown, 1995; Richards, 2001), English teaching for specific purposes (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987; Robinson, 1991), as well as that of task-based language teaching (Long, 2005, to appear). Needs analysis (a term used interchangeably with 'needs assessment') refers to "the activities involved in gathering information that will serve as the basis for developing a curriculum that will meet the learning needs of a particular group of students" (Brown, 1995, p. 35). In needs analysis studies, researchers usually collect both qualitative and quantitative information through questionnaires, tests, interviews and observations.

In major academic journals, few needs analysis studies have been reported from general EFL contexts, although many have appeared in college in-house publications in Japan (e.g., Busch, Elsea, Gruba, & Johnson, 1992; Yonesaka, 1994; Nishihori, 1994; Hayasaka, 1995; Tachiki, 2002; Kumazawa, 2003; Kusanagi & Kumazawa, 2004; Kuwabara, Nakanishi, & Komai, 2005). Most of the studies have used questionnaires to collect responses from university students on their English language learning needs. However, it has proven difficult to identify the needs of English learners in EFL situations, where there is not necessarily a demand for using English in daily life. Teachers in EFL classrooms need to deal with a situation such as that which Abbott (1980) facetiously described as TENOR (Teaching English for No Obvious Reasons). Although many students in Japan study English for college entrance examinations or various tests, such as the TOEIC or TOEFL, there is not a strong need to study English for daily communication purposes. Even in what is described in this paper as an EAP program, the students' actual use of English for

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communicative purposes is limited, since only a small percentage go on to study abroad or even take upper level courses taught in English. It is a challenge to provide university students in Japan with a convincing rationale for acquiring communicative competence in English. Therefore, there is a strong need for intrinsically motivating materials and methods, and tasks that simulate ways that students *might* be called upon to use the language outside the classroom. At their best, needs analysis studies serve as bridges between the needs of students and the innovations, or minor tweaks, that meet those needs.

2. Defining Needs

What is 'intrinsically motivating' differs from individual to individual and group to group, so we felt it necessary to determine the motivating factors among our population of students and the range of differences within that population. We began by looking at what other curriculum planners have focused on in their needs analysis studies in EFL contexts, where the specification of desirable target tasks is a particular challenge. Brindley (1989, p. 70) contrasts objective needs and subjective needs as follows:

The first of these terms... refers to needs, which are derivable from different kinds of factual information about learners, their use of language in real-life communication situations as well as their current language proficiency and language difficulties. The second term refers to the cognitive and affective needs of the learner in the learning situation, derivable from information about affective and cognitive factors such as personality, confidence, attitudes, learners' wants and expectations with regard to the learning of English and their individual cognitive style and learning strategies.

Robinson (1991) observed that objective needs have often been

studied by investigating the teachers' views, while subjective needs have typically been gleaned from learners' views. Objective needs include various kinds of information about the learners' *necessities*, that is, what they have to be able to do using the target language, as well as *lacks (deficiencies)*, what learners do not know or cannot do presently (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). Although objective needs are fairly easily obtained from clear-cut, observable data, subjective needs are more difficult to determine since they involve learners' *wants (aspirations)* and *desires* (Berwick, 1989; Brown, 1995).

Long (2005) argued that a needs analysis should be conducted to determine learners' objective needs in order to identify target tasks. Pedagogical tasks would then be derived from the target tasks by domain experts who know enough about the tasks learners need in order to accomplish real-word objectives. However, needs analysis studies in Japan often have been limited to analyzing the subjective needs of learners, usually using questionnaires to reveal the learners' *perception* of needs.

3. *Triangulation of Sources and Methods in NA studies*

Although EFL needs analysis studies in Japan have not usually involved domain experts—e.g., professors of business administration, those involved in the training of nurses, or authorities on legal proceedings—as sources of data from settings where students are likely to function after graduating, some studies have included a variety of informants (e.g., teachers, program administrators, and graduates). Kikuchi (2001) attempted to analyze English language learners' needs in his study of university students enrolled in the listening section of a three-semester long intensive EAP program. Following suggestions by Brown (1995), students were queried about their perceptions of target tasks, priorities in learning, attitudes toward the program, current problems in the program, and their ideas about possible solutions. Figure 1 lists questions used in his study. By

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using these seven questions, both subjective and objective needs were investigated, as well as goal-oriented needs. In his study he looked into the extent to which the identified needs were being met by the program's structure and materials, in hopes that a direction for future developments to the program would be suggested.

1. TARGET TASKS: What kinds of things would you like to do in the future using English?
2. PROBLEMS: What kinds of things do you have difficulty with in listening?
3. PRIORITIES: What kinds of things would you prefer to listen to in the IE Listening class?
4. ABILITIES: What kinds of things can you do using English now?
5. ATTITUDES: What do you like and dislike about your IE Listening class?
6. PROBLEMS: Do you have any complaints or problems concerning the IE Listening class?
7. SOLUTIONS: Do you feel that your IE Listening class helps your English listening comprehension? If not, do you have any ideas about what should be changed?

Figure 1. Seven questions used in the needs analysis study (Kikuchi, 2001).

In recent literature on needs analysis in our field, the triangulation of methods and sources is argued to be important (Brown, 1995; Long, 2005). In the study conducted by Kikuchi (2001), students, teachers, and program administrators were queried in order to triangulate information sources for language needs utilizing both open-response and closed-response questionnaires, interviews, and classroom observations. By triangulating methods and sources, he sought to

determine the subjective needs from students and the more objectively perceived needs from teachers based on their real-world experiences. As some of the participating Japanese teachers were graduates of the program themselves (See Kikuchi, 2004, for further details) an interesting blurring of objective and subjective perspectives was achieved. Based on a report submitted to the program, the curriculum developers introduced a wider variety of tasks (especially ones allowing for interaction among students), more materials that appealed to students' interests (particularly music and film clips), and materials of current relevance rather than ones of a 'timeless' nature (Kikuchi, Ernst, and Strong, 2004; Dias and Kikuchi, 2010).

Our current study is a follow-up on Kikuchi (2001), utilizing more data resources, five years after the first large-scale needs analysis study was implemented in the program. In his book on survey research, Brown (2001, p. 29) lists the types of triangulation as follows:

1. Data triangulation - using multiple sources of information
2. Investigator triangulation - using multiple researchers
3. Theory triangulation - using multiple conceptual viewpoints
4. Methodological triangulation - using multiple data-gathering procedures
5. Interdisciplinary triangulation - using the perspectives of multiple disciplines
6. Time triangulation - using multiple data-gathering occasions
7. Location triangulation - using multiple data-gathering sites.

Four of these types of triangulation were employed in the study described in this paper, which involved 325 current students, 15 teachers, and 26 participants who had already completed the program (data triangulation). In addition, one of the two program coordinators joined as an investigator (investigator triangulation). The methods used included open-response and closed-response questionnaires with

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students, open-response questionnaires with teachers, interviews, and focus group sessions with former students of the course (methodological triangulation). The same questionnaire items as those outlined in Figure 1 were used in order to determine similarities and differences between responses in the spring semester of 2000 and the fall semester of 2005 (time triangulation).

Following the research design used in Kikuchi (2001), we attempted to answer the following questions in the current study.

1. *What are our learners' needs, as revealed by various methods and sources?*
2. *How do the current learners' needs differ from those in the study conducted by Kikuchi (2001), five years prior to the present study?*
3. *Reflecting the results of the NA, how might the program better meet the needs of students?*

Note that in the discussion section we report on how we came to realize the naivety of expecting that the answers to the first two research questions alone would suggest an adequate response to the third by offering a desirable direction for the program and a concrete blueprint for change.

II. Methods

1. Participants

This study focused on identifying English language learners' needs in an EAP program of the English Department at Aoyama Gakuin University, Tokyo, Japan. The department started an intensive English program, called Integrated English (IE), in 1992 for its freshmen and sophomore students. There are three English sections in the program divided into three levels (IE Core, IE Writing, and IE Listening). They share the same themes: memories, urban life, food, and travel (IE 1); changing times, the work place, geography, and biography (IE 2); relationships, cross-cultural values, environment, and the media (IE 3). Students in the program take IE Core (180 min), IE Writing

(90 min), and IE Listening (90 min) weekly. All three sections at each level must cover these four themes during the 12-14 weeks of each semester. Students are placed at an appropriate level based on their performance in the TOEFL ITP test at the beginning of their studies. Typically, students move up to a higher level each semester. After finishing level 3, students take IE seminars taught by native speakers of English on various academic topics (See Strong, 2007 for a more detailed description of the program).

Out of the three sections of the program, this study focused on the needs of students in the listening section. When the two questionnaires were conducted, in the fall semester of 2005, there were 598 students registered, and 8 instructors were teaching 9 classes (one teacher taught two sections). The IE Listening courses were taught by native speakers of Japanese with the exception of three North American instructors. Three hundred and twenty five students (63 males and 262 females) responded to Questionnaire A (open-response) in November 2005, while 260 students (49 males and 214 females) responded to Questionnaire B (closed-response) in January 2006. The ratio of male to female respondents closely corresponded to their relative numbers in the program. In the case of the teachers' questionnaire, distributed in June of 2005, 11 completed questionnaires were returned, as instructors who had taught in the spring semester were queried along with the fall term instructors. In this section, a description is provided of the 260 responses to the students' Questionnaire B and the 11 responses to the questionnaire administered to teachers.

The ages of the students who responded to Questionnaire B were 18 ($n = 58$), 19 ($n = 125$), 20 ($n = 67$), 21 ($n = 7$), and 22 ($n = 6$). Sixty seven percent of the respondents were enrolled in level 2, while 11% were enrolled in level 3 and 57 students were enrolled in IE seminars. Of the 260 participants, 50 (19%) reported that they had had experience living outside Japan for more than one year. The

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three sections at each 12-14 weeks of each level based on their timing of their studies. Each semester. After taught by native speakers (Kikuchi, 2007 for a more

study focused on the topic. When the two semesters of 2005, there were two teachers teaching 9 IE Listening courses with the exception of one and twenty five added to Questionnaire A students (49 males and 49 females) in a closed-response in which respondents closely followed the program. In the case of the year 2005, 11 completed the questionnaire who had taught in the previous term. In the fall term instructors. In the year 2005, 260 responses to the questionnaire were received.

Questionnaire B were completed by 7, and 22 (n = 6). The questionnaire was rolled in level 2, while the students were enrolled in IE Listening courses. It was reported that they had taught for more than one year. The

lengths of their experiences abroad ranged from one year to 15 years ($M = 4.85$, $Mdn = 4$). Eight focus groups of three students each were brought together in semi-structured sessions to discuss their views of IE Listening courses and to offer suggestions for improvement. These students had completed the full battery of IE Listening classes the previous semester or academic year. As the students who responded to the questionnaires had been concurrently enrolled in IE Listening courses, it was hoped that a fresh perspective could be provided by the focus groups, and we wished to determine what, if anything, was memorable about IE Listening.

2. Materials

Questionnaires A and B were adapted in large part from Kikuchi (2001). In questionnaire B, some items were added or revised after the analysis of the responses of Questionnaire A. Apart from those revisions or additions, items were identical to those administered in the year 2000. All instructions and items in the questionnaires were presented in the participants' first language, Japanese. The survey creation and administration system SurveyMonkey (SurveyMonkey.com, 1999-2010) was used to create the questionnaire. Respondents were asked to respond to the questions online. A specific website address was reserved for the survey so that access was restricted to only the desired respondents. The questionnaire items administered to teachers in June of 2005 paralleled those asked of students so that the perceptions of teachers and students could be compared.

3. Procedures

Teachers were asked to cooperate in administering the online student questionnaires. Ten to fifteen minutes of class time was reserved and teachers were instructed to direct their students to the survey's web page. All the classes completed the surveys within a period of two weeks, between November 2005 (Questionnaire A) and

January 2006 (Questionnaire B). Students were informed of the purpose of the survey and how the data would be used in an introduction to the questionnaire. Students were told that they would be informed of the results of the survey and given the option to input their email contact address so that the results could be forwarded to them. We felt that this was an important way for students to feel as though they were being treated as stakeholders in the endeavor.

In the fall semester of 2006, two foreign and three Japanese teachers were interviewed to determine the levels of uptake, and attitudes toward, some of the most recently introduced changes to the program. Figure 2 lists the core questions covered in those interviews.

- 1) Have the most recent changes made to the course materials (e.g., the introduction of Internet-related pre/post listening activities) affected the way you teach the class?
- 2) Some instructors teaching this course are reluctant to do pair and group work or pre/post listening activities. Why do you think that is the case?
- 3) Do you have any policy about language use in the classroom--either the language you use when speaking to students or the language you ask the students to use when they are speaking with each other?
- 4) Have you introduced any required or voluntary outside-of-class listening tasks for your IE Listening students (for example, listening and reporting about podcasts, DVDs, or news in English)? If so, what has been the response from students?

Figure 2. Questions asked of teachers in interviews.

As a way to stimulate reflection in the focus group sessions, which were conducted in English in June 2007 by one of the investigators,

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the in-house listening texts were provided for the perusal of students. All sessions were videotaped and subsequently transcribed with the help of graduate student TAs.

III. Results

Results reported in this section will concentrate on the questionnaires and focus groups as length considerations preclude detailed coverage of the other findings. We will describe the results of each category of the students' survey: their views on target tasks, current problems in the program and their ideas for possible solutions, priorities in learning, and attitudes toward the program. In Tables 2 to 8, quantitative data obtained at two different times are presented with descriptive statistics, means and standard deviations. In the following section, the results of qualitative investigations (focus-group interviews and open-ended questionnaires from teachers and students) are presented.

1. Learners' target tasks

Question 1 (shown in Table 1) was used to determine how students intended to use English in their future life. Although we hoped that the target tasks uncovered in the questionnaire would inform us about the listening course, we purposely asked a general question about target tasks so as not to impose our preconceptions on what was most relevant to listening. As the program strives to incorporate the four skills in all the courses—even those with an overt focus on particular skills—we felt that reading and writing should play a role, even in IE Listening. We hoped that the survey would suggest directions for how that integration could be accomplished. In Table 1, eleven choices are shown in descending order of mean values. In addition to the original ten choices used in Kikuchi (2001), two choices (*Reading English books/magazines for fun* and *Reading something academic*) were included in this study since they frequently appeared in the responses

to the open-ended questionnaire. Five choices have means higher than 4.00. *Traveling* [$M=4.68$, $SD=0.52$], *watching movies for fun* [$M=4.49$, $SD=0.70$], *living in foreign countries* [$M=4.20$, $SD=0.94$], *studying abroad* [$M=4.20$, $SD=1.04$], and *reading English/books/magazines for fun* [$M=4.18$, $SD=0.89$] are strongly favored choices. On the other hand, *becoming interpreters* [$M=3.20$, $SD=1.15$], *Reading something academic* [$M=3.02$, $SD=1.24$] and *teaching at school* [$M=2.68$, $SD=1.34$] have means lower than 3.50. Except the choice *talking with friends casually* [$M=3.80$, $SD=1.08$], the choices regarding English in the workplace or academic settings are less favored than the choices regarding English in personal settings. These tendencies were consistent in 2005 and 2000.

Table 1
IE Learners' Target Tasks

	2005 data		2000 data	
	Mean (SD)		Mean (SD)	
Traveling	4.68	(0.52)	4.71	(0.69)
Watching movies for fun	4.49	(0.70)	4.22	(1.06)
Living in foreign countries	4.20	(0.94)	3.90	(1.17)
Studying abroad	4.20	(1.04)	4.11	(1.02)
Reading English books/magazines for fun	4.18	(0.89)		
Using at work in Japanese companies	3.96	(1.04)	3.71	(1.09)
Working in foreign companies	3.85	(1.07)	3.78	(1.14)
Talking with friends casually	3.80	(1.08)	3.32	(1.39)
Becoming interpreters/translators	3.20	(1.15)	2.99	(1.30)
Reading academic content	3.02	(1.24)		
Teach at school	2.68	(1.34)	2.47	(1.35)

2. Learners' problems

Next, Question 2 (shown in Table 4.3) sought to reveal the difficulties students experienced in their IE Listening classes. In Table 2, seven choices are shown in descending order of mean values. In addition to

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the original choices used in Kikuchi (2001), one choice (*Connected sounds unique in English*) was included. Three choices have means higher than 3.5: *unknown vocabulary* [$M=3.70$, $SD=1.00$], *colloquial phrases and jokes* [$M=3.70$, $SD=1.12$], and *connected sounds unique in English* [$M=3.61$, $SD=1.21$]. This suggests that vocabulary, informal phrases, and connected sounds cause students consternation in listening, whereas students tend to have fewer problems with *length of the video* [$M=3.02$, $SD=1.13$], and *task sheets* [$M=2.86$, $SD=1.05$]. These propensities were consistent in both 2005 and 2000 studies.

Table 2

IE Learners' Difficulties in Listening

	2005 data		2000 data	
	Mean (SD)		Mean (SD)	
Unknown vocabulary	3.70	(1.00)	3.94	(0.96)
Colloquial phrases and jokes	3.70	(1.12)	3.70	(1.14)
Connected sounds unique in English	3.61	(1.21)		
Speed too fast	3.49	(1.19)	3.66	(1.09)
Different accents of the speakers	3.33	(1.08)	3.05	(1.12)
Film segments are too long; hard to concentrate	3.02	(1.13)	2.93	(1.20)
Task sheet is monotonous	2.86	(1.05)	2.50	(1.01)

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Question six gives us a more general view of what complaints or problems learners have in their IE Listening class. Students were asked to click as many choices as applicable. In Table 3, eight choices are shown in order of the most to the least common responses. In addition to the original choices used in Kikuchi (2001), one more choice (*One-way nature of teaching*) was included. One-fifth of the students said that they did not have any complaints or problems in the program. More than one-third of the students complained that there was insufficient time allocated for the class and for daily conversation skills in particular, and that there was little variety in the video

materials. Furthermore, less than 25% of the students complained about the *One-way nature of teaching*. It seems that there were still a wide variety of complaints and perceived problems when one considers that higher percentages of students clicked every choice except *none*, *other*, and *too much focus on difficult vocabulary*, compared to the response pattern in 2000.

Table 3

IE Learners' Complaints, Problems in class

	2005 data		2000 data	
Inadequate amount of class time (90 minutes a week) to listen to English	95	(36.50%)	79	(22.38%)
Insufficient focus on daily conversation skills	89	(34.20%)	105	(29.75%)
Little variety in the materials	88	(33.80%)	84	(23.80%)
One-way nature of teaching	60	(23.10%)		
None	53	(20.40%)	112	(31.73%)
Too many students in the class	36	(13.80%)	28	(7.93%)
Other	35	(13.50%)	28	(18.70%)
Too much focus on difficult vocabulary	30	(11.50%)	57	(16.15%)

3. Learners' priorities

Question 3 probed students' listening preferences in their IE Listening class. In Table 4, five choices are shown in mean order. Three responses have a mean higher than 4.0. *Movies* [$M=4.63$, $SD=0.59$], *popular songs in English* [$M=4.43$, $SD=0.78$], and *TV dramas* [$M=4.34$, $SD=0.83$] are all strongly favored. On the other hand, it seems that students have less of a preference for listening to *news such as that shown on CNN and ABC* [$M=3.66$, $SD=1.11$] or *documentary films* [$M=3.17$, $SD=1.14$]. More than 25% of the students either *strongly disagreed* or *disagreed* with the desirability of these choices of content. Again, these tendencies were consistent both in 2005 and 2000.

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Table 4

IE Learners' Preferred Listening Materials

	2005 data		2000 data	
	Mean (SD)		Mean (SD)	
Movies	4.63	(0.59)	4.65	(0.69)
Pop songs	4.43	(0.78)	4.17	(1.05)
TV dramas in English	4.34	(0.83)	4.37	(0.94)
Current news such as CNN or ABC news	3.66	(1.11)	3.16	(1.21)
Documentaries, educational programs	3.17	(1.14)	3.13	(1.12)

2000 data

79 (22.38%)

105 (29.75%)

84 (23.80%)

112 (31.73%)

28 (7.93%)

28 (18.70%)

57 (16.15%)

4. Learners' abilities

Question 4 focused on what students could do currently. Students were asked to click as many choices as they felt applied to them. In Table 5, seven choices are shown in the order of the most to the least frequently selected items. More than two-thirds of the students stated that they could give directions on the street to foreigners. More than one-third of the students stated that they were able to have a conversation with a foreigner or talk with the teacher in class. About 20% of the students answered that they could do very little in English. Most of the students admitted to having very limited English proficiency. So, it is understandable that comprehending current news, such as CNN or ABC, would be very difficult for many students. Again, these tendencies were consistent both in 2005 and 2000.

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Table 5

IE Learners' English Abilities

	2005 data		2000 data	
Give directions on the street to foreigners	185	(71.20%)	276	(75.00%)
Hold a conversation with a foreigner	124	(47.70%)	210	(57.07%)
Talk with the teacher in class	96	(36.90%)	131	(35.60%)
Very little	50	(19.20%)	79	(21.58%)
Understand an English movie without subtitles	46	(17.70%)	84	(22.95%)
Live abroad communicating solely in English	29	(11.20%)	45	(12.23%)
Understand news shows such as CNN or ABC	26	(10.00%)	32	(8.72%)

5. Learners' attitudes

Question 7 (reported in Table 6) helped to reveal students' general attitudes about the program. Students were asked to express how much they felt the course was helping them. Their responses were measured by a 5-point Likert scale in this study, while a 4-point Likert scale was used in the previous study because more than 70% of the students selected, noncommittally, either 2 or 3 in Kikuchi (2001). A 5-point likert-scale was used to elicit a wider range of responses. Nonetheless, about half of the students selected 3 in the current study. Only a few students chose either strongly disagree (1.36%) or strongly agree (8.76%). It seems that many students did not have strong positive or negative attitudes toward the program.

Table 6

IE Learners' Attitudes Towards IE Listening Class

7. To what extent do you feel that IE listening class was helpful?	Mean	1	2	3	4	5	
2005 five-point likert scale data (N=252)	3.61	0.82	1.36%	9.09%	26.03%	54.59%	8.76%
2000 four-point likert scale data (N=249)	2.87	0.83	6.37%	22.44%	48.75%	22.44%	N/A

6. Solution

As part of the study, it would be interesting to see if the descending order of the solutions favored by the students ($SD=1.20$) was supported by the population ($SD=3.07$, $SD=$ variety of more on the supported use population able to handle $[M=3.88, t$

Table 7

Solutions for

To use a great
To focus more
To use popular
To give students
video in class
To give students
and review
To use English
To give some

7. Teachers

Thirteen of the questionnaires in Question 7 Responses

6. Solutions

As part of Question 7, students were asked which ideas they agreed would improve the course. In Table 7, seven choices are shown in descending order of mean values. Although most of the ideas were favored by students, "to use English for all the instruction" [$M=3.19$, $SD=1.20$] and "to give some listening homework assignments" [$M=3.07$, $SD=1.13$] were relatively unpopular. In contrast, using a greater variety of videos was most popular [$M=4.27$, $SD=0.84$]. To focus more on daily conversation skills [$M=4.23$, $SD=0.83$] was also supported by students. Many students also agreed with the ideas to use popular English songs in class [$M=4.15$, $SD=0.95$], and to be able to have access to the scripts after watching videos in class [$M=3.88$, $SD=1.01$].

Table 7
Solutions for Problems in IE Listening Class

	2005 data		2000 data	
	Mean (SD)		Mean (SD)	
To use a greater variety of videos	4.27	(0.84)	3.97	(1.00)
To focus more on daily conversational skills	4.23	(0.83)	4.20	(0.92)
To use popular songs in class	4.15	(0.95)	3.85	(1.15)
To give students the scripts after watching the video in class	3.88	(1.01)	3.81	(1.16)
To give students a tape from the class to listen to and review	3.66	(1.06)	3.46	(1.21)
To use English for all the instruction	3.19	(1.20)	2.80	(1.27)
To give some listening homework assignments	3.07	(1.13)	2.64	(1.22)

7. Teachers' questionnaires

Thirteen out of eighteen teachers responded to the teachers' questionnaire, which asked basically the same series of questions as in Questionnaire A for students, but from the teachers' point of view. Responses corresponded quite closely with ones given by students.

2000 data	
276	(75.00%)
210	(57.07%)
131	(35.60%)
79	(21.58%)
84	(22.95%)
45	(12.23%)
32	(8.72%)

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	4	5
1%	54.59%	8.76%
5%	22.44%	N/A

However, in terms of target tasks, teachers tended to emphasize ones related to career goals, whereas the students expressed expectations that they would use English for travel or to enjoy movies. Several teachers admitted that they had no idea what their students' future uses of English might be, while those who had asked them directly found their responses to be vague.

When asked what students could do using English, teachers identified a much wider range of skills than students attributed to themselves. Some teachers also pointed out that students sometimes have lower or higher levels of ability than their assigned level would indicate, requiring flexibility on the part of the teacher.

There was a close match between teacher and student perceived difficulties in regard to listening, with both constituencies seeing limited vocabulary, colloquial expressions, and features of the language—such as assimilation, speed, and ellipsis—presenting barriers to comprehension. Table 8 summarizes the results of the teachers' questionnaire, showing the teachers' perceptions of learners' difficulties, preferences, and abilities, as well as teachers' attitudes. Numbers in parentheses, added to some items, indicate the number of times they occurred in the data. Items where no number is indicated, appear only once in the data.

Table 8
A Summ

Learners' Problems
* Certain s
of English
assimilation
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*Colloquial
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8. Focus

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Table 8

A Summary of Teachers' Questionnaire Results

Learners' Problems	Learners' Preferences	Learners' Abilities	Teachers' Attitudes
* Certain sound features of English (e.g., assimilation, ellipsis, and speed)	Materials that they like:	They can:	They favored:
* Colloquial English in TV shows, songs, and movies.	* Current events	* Act as an English teacher at prep school	* Clear purposes (objectives) stated for each section
* Inability to respond well to anything but multiple choice questions.	* Documentaries	* Engage in short talks	* Comedies and clips of films with themes that were familiar to students
* Sustaining concentration	* Popular dramas	* Enjoy films without subtitles.	* "Effective" post-listening section
* Poor vocabulary exacerbated by encounters with novel vocabulary, technical terms, and unfamiliar topics.	* Fun or useful materials	* Express what they want to say	* Freedom in choosing materials they use
	* Materials with transcripts	* Get the main points from news and documentaries	* Listening tips being introduced in some units
	* Movies (5)	* Talk about familiar things that interest them.	* Materials being well-organized
	* News programs (5)	* Take orders at restaurants	* Variety of materials
	* Travel videos		
	* Songs		
	Materials that learners dislike:		
	* Decontextualized scenes from movies		
	* Materials that look old		
	* Sections in the text on music		

8. Focus groups

Eight focus groups of three students each, made up of individuals who had already finished the program, were brought together in semi-structured sessions to discuss their listening courses and offer suggestions for improvement. Student comments arising from the focus groups were placed into seven categories, which emerged from the data: 1) desirable content; 2) materials design and access issues; 3) class procedures and tasks; 4) the role of teachers; 5) class management; 6) evaluation; and 7) learner beliefs. Some of the comments fell into multiple categories. Three of these categories, and comments falling under them, are listed in Figure 3.

- 1) desirable content
 - ◆ topics which are related to the lives of students
 - ◆ content featuring contemporary English (so that students don't embarrass themselves by using archaic expressions)
- 2) materials design and access issues
 - ◆ students should be given CDs or DVDs containing the multimedia materials used in the course to facilitate self-study
 - ◆ an answer key should be provided for the text to encourage self-study
 - ◆ pre-listening exercises involving the matching of vocabulary to definitions were not helpful because they prevented students from developing the skill of guessing vocabulary from the context
 - ◆ some students thought that it wasn't necessarily deleterious for listening exercises to test memory as much as listening comprehension ability since some popular standardized tests (e.g., TOEIC) require a certain degree of memorization
- 3) class procedures and tasks
 - ◆ more opportunities for speaking should be introduced
 - ◆ a challenging task involving multiple repetitions is appreciated
 - ◆ opportunities for informal exchanges between teachers and students
 - ◆ preference for fewer chapters covered at greater depth to lots of material covered in a hurried fashion
 - ◆ although avoided by some teachers, pre- and post-listening tasks were seen as useful in allowing students to focus on the main ideas of listening texts

Figure 3. Key findings from focus-group interviews.

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Some of the issues that came out of the focus groups reinforced what had already been uncovered through the surveys and interviews; for example, the fact that some teachers focused on the "while listening" exercises to the exclusion of pre- and post-listening in a teacher-centered manner. However, focus groups seemed particularly good at revealing the students' metalinguistic and metacognitive understandings. One instance of meta-cognitive awareness was exhibited in a student's recognition that some of the listening exercises amounted to tests of memory, just as much as an assessment of listening comprehension, which was not necessarily viewed in a negative light. Other evidence of meta-cognitive awareness was seen in the students' realization that the program aimed to teach the four skills in an integrated way. They saw listening as a skill integrated with the other three skills, particularly speaking and reading. They frequently brought in to the conversation what they were doing in their Core classes and IE Seminars when speaking of listening. They did not see listening as a skill to be developed solely in IE Listening. Students appeared to appreciate the connections among the skills and how they are addressed in the various courses.

An advantage of focus groups is that they offer opportunities for student interaction and the moderator of the focus groups can follow-up on comments and suggestions or ask for clarification. Another benefit is that whereas students do not necessarily feel that their voices are being heard when filling out surveys or course evaluations—which can become routine—the intimate nature of focus groups made it clear to students that their views are valued and can lead to positive change.

Some negative aspects of the program intimated in the surveys were underlined in the focus groups. For example, there was little that was memorable about the course texts. If they remembered any tasks, they were tasks introduced for materials brought in by the more enterprising teachers, such as a task involving the writing of

descriptions of characters in the American TV drama "Lost," and revising the descriptions and personality characteristics as the drama unfolded. This suggested that tasks which allowed the students to engage critically with the content would be more memorable, and perhaps of greater long-term, pedagogic worth.

IV. Discussion

The research questions posed earlier will be posited in this section and discussed in light of the results of the NA.

1. *What are learners' needs as revealed by various methods/ sources?*

Major findings included the following:

- Learners are more oriented to non-academic uses of English such as English for travel, English-medium films, and recreational reading of English books and magazines; whereas teachers put greater emphasis on career goals and immediate academic needs.
- Both teachers and learners had similar perceptions of the difficulties involved in listening, with limited vocabulary, colloquial expressions, connected sounds unique to English, and the speed of naturally spoken English, being the main obstacles to comprehension.
- In terms of content, students expressed interest in movies and music, while teachers tended to overestimate the students' interest in news, current events, and documentaries, perhaps superimposing their own interests upon the students.
- Both teachers and students saw the video material as being rather dated. The advent of new media, such as podcasting and video streaming (e.g., YouTube) has affected students' perspectives on the freshness of content and there is less tolerance of materials that do not appear to be the latest.

A rich mosaic of students' and teachers' needs and perceptions were depicted. Points of consensus between the preferences and

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perceptions of teachers and students would be given priority in informing program administrators of the direction of change, while the points of divergence could be seen as possible constraints, challenges, or areas that require "consciousness raising" so that all parties involved in the learning endeavor can have mutual understanding.

2. How do these current learners' needs differ from those in the study by Kikuchi (2001), which focused on students five years before?

As noted in the results section, it was found that students' responses to the questionnaire were remarkably similar even though they were gathered through paper and pencil in 2000 and online in 2005. In other words, even though different students were enrolled in the program and the mechanics of inquiry differed, perceived wants, difficulties, and abilities changed little over time, as seen in tables 4, 2 and 5, respectively. Possible explanations for this include:

- Revisions to the program after the first needs analysis were not adequate to effect substantial change in attitudes and perceptions.
- Students with similar characteristics tend to enter the university and their attitudes are not easily affected by changes in the curriculum due to their homogenous backgrounds.
- The relatively structured nature of questionnaires had the normative function of reflecting and perpetuating the status quo of the program, shortcomings that interviews and focus groups have the potential to offset.

3. Reflecting on the results of the NA, how might the program better meet the needs of students?

This question, arguably the most important, is the most difficult to answer because the needs analysis provided us with a mountain of data, but little of it indicating clear paths toward more efficacious tasks, patterns of interaction, technologies, and ways of structuring

the learning environment. The relative randomness and necessarily selective nature of approaching an answer to this question, belies the apparent scientific rigor of all that came before. As pockets are only so deep and time to implement changes so limited, priority was given to adopting the following "data-inspired" changes:

- As learners were more oriented to such non-academic uses of English as being able to comprehend English-medium films, and teachers had the equally valid orientation to the career goals and immediate academic needs of their students, we tried to accommodate both by designing listening content around, for example, interviews with non-native English-speaking professionals of various sorts who use English in the course of their work. In these interviews, the necessity of a focus on form and academic preparedness is built into engaging content. In this way, academic and career goals are approached through the portal of students' interests.
- As learner and teacher perceptions of the difficulties involved in listening converged, and little systematic instruction addressed this within the program, it was decided that in addition to exposure to extended expanses of discourse in film clips, students would be given opportunities to replay short snippets of the larger whole, which illustrated such features of the spoken language as assimilation, ellipsis, and devoicing, for example. In so doing, it was hoped that anxiety and frustration could be relieved as students gained insights into what they were missing and why.

Perhaps the most substantive changes involved creative, outside-the-box thinking about how identified needs could be met through changes not directly addressed by the needs analysis, such as the following:

- As all the listening classes take place in Internet-connected CALL classrooms, we realized that we were not taking full

advantage of the Internet for use in pre- and post-listening exercises, so engaging Internet extensions to many of the existing materials were added. These additions increased the motivation of students to interact purposely through information gaps.

- More interaction among students and with teachers was called for by students but large class size was an inhibiting factor, so, it was decided that the classes of 40+ students would be divided in half, with the two halves alternately doing task-based listening in class, and self-access online listening outside of class. In other words, the class size remained the same officially, but, as the students were differentially employed each week, the reduced number of students in any given class made it possible for teachers to carry out newly introduced interactive listening tasks (Dias & Kikuchi, 2010). Unfortunately, institutional constraints prevented this plan from being realized shortly before the proposed time of implementation.

V. Conclusion

We confirmed that combining both quantitative and qualitative methods is important in conducting studies in curriculum development (Kikuchi, 2004). However, results of the questionnaires were markedly similar when administered for a second time after a five-year interval in 2005, despite changes made to the program in the form of new teaching material that was believed to better reflect student preferences, more emphasis in teacher orientations on the use of pair and group work in pre- and post-listening tasks, and more latitude for students to select materials for self-study.

A benefit of focus groups was that—whereas students do not necessarily feel that their voices are being heard when filling out surveys or course evaluations, which can become routine—the intimate nature of focus groups made it clear to students that their views are valued and can lead to positive change. A number of

students in the focus groups expressed pleased astonishment when told at the close of the session that their input was highly valued and would contribute to the improvement of materials and methods.

In trying to make sense of the data, and use the findings in a constructive way, a key question arose: Can a needs analysis like the one we conducted tell us at what point change—beyond gradual, incremental ‘improvements’—in a program is necessary? At least in the way we posed the questions, and perhaps due to the fact that, for comparative purposes, we advanced the same questions in the two rounds of needs analysis in 2000 and 2005, we felt that the question would have to be answered in the negative.

A major problem in basing a needs analysis upon one previously conducted is that key outside-of-the-box questions, perhaps centering on issues that arose during the interim, might be ignored. Even though surveys, particularly online instruments, are a cost effective method of inquiry, the information they generate can suffer from what has been termed “bounded rationality” (Cameron, 1988). This refers to the fact that a survey can only uncover needs that respondents are cognizant of, based on that which currently exists and is known to them. In the case of the program under investigation here, areas that were largely missed in the needs analysis included, for instance, the role that newer technologies may play in responding to chronic weaknesses. Although some of the problems were re-identified, proposed solutions—such as restructuring the time spent in in-class vs. outside-of-class activities, and the introduction of computer self-access in an integrated way with classroom instruction—came from sources of input beyond the needs analysis.

Brown, Kelly, Kikuchi & Umeda (2006) have noted that “in many respects, NA is a collection of stories,” however, “many questions remain as to whose stories to collect, what stories to collect, and how to collect them (p. 115).” In our NA, as in all others, some of the stories are missing. For example, we did not collect data from the

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actual English needs of alumni employed in various occupations. Actually, the university collects detailed data on where students are employed, and that in itself is revealing and easily obtainable. Neither did we seek 'stories' from our IT division, which is in the first line of attack from teachers and students when the CALL classrooms malfunction. Professors who teach courses in the fields in which the students from our program come to specialize (communications, linguistics, and literature) would also have been a rich source of "stories."

In conclusion, those embarking on a comprehensive needs analysis of a large language program should expect an Everest of data to be generated, much of them tangential to what may be the key concerns of the stakeholders. Perhaps the fact that few needs analysis studies to date have produced concrete changes to a curriculum (Altschuld & Witkin, 2000), is due to the paralyzing effect of this information overload and the arduousness of separating the wheat from the chaff of findings. The use of online survey instruments can save tremendous amounts of time, but throughout the entire process, the data must be coded, categorized, and interpreted, as it does not speak for itself. Support from administrators, colleagues, and (if possible) teaching assistants, is of vital importance.

Specific changes do not necessarily follow directly from a needs analysis. They must be mediated by the overall goals and objectives of a program, what one has determined to be obstacles to their implementation, and the intuitions of experienced teachers and program administrators. It is also essential to liaise with those at the helm of programs with similar constituencies. The role of intuition, in particular, should not be dismissed. It has the greatest likelihood of being helpful, though, when the researcher has close contact with the clients and knowledge of emerging trends. Needs analysis should be conducted in collaboration with practitioners and approached as a dynamic process taking account of affective factors and the interplay

between perceptions and actions arising from them. We hope that this study serves as an example of such an endeavor to conduct a large-scale needs analysis study involving the triangulation of sources and methods in EFL contexts.

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