The Role of Needs Analysis and Learner Differences in Language Learning

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Abstract: This paper investigates the necessity of needs analysis and learning styles in foreign language learning namely English and presents the findings of small scale research to contribute teaching and learning.

Keywords: Observation, questionnaire, visual, kinesthetic, auditory, triangular approach.

Introduction
It is crucial for every teacher to be aware of the learners needs to make lessons more meaningful, effective and these can be basis for choosing methods, strategies, approaches, techniques in class procedure. Besides, needs analysis can create opportunities for teachers to make lesson plans, government authorities to work on, design syllabus and curriculum for learners of the same age, level learners (Berwick, 1989). When it is used as a part of teaching process, it assists learners to control their own learning and relationship between teacher and student becomes closer (Richards J.C, 1998). During teaching process at school where I work, I have chosen a pupil who studies in the 11th form to conduct needs analysis. My participant is a girl with strong desire to learn languages for future career. I am willing to know her exact level, difficulties, wants, needs from the target language as I will be teaching them through this semester. Besides, I will have to work with such students at Universities and other educational organizations and knowing about their individual needs will help me to conduct lessons and cope with difficulties in teaching and learning process. I expect the outcomes of this small scale research to provide general background about learners of the same age.

Learner profile
Participant chosen for this research is a pupil who is 17 years old (Name Ann, name has been changed for privacy) and has already been attending language courses. She is a native Uzbek and getting excellent grades at school excelling others in academic field. Moreover, the participant is extrovert and sociable by nature getting on well with others in any social meetings. She is in touch with friends through social networking. More precisely, she enjoys doing sport; table tennis and swimming are kinds of sport which she does on her daily life. In future she is going to be a businesswoman who works for development of her native country and improve the facilities for all by visiting foreign countries, investing on education and creating more job opportunities for the unemployed. From the point of learning process she finds reading the most challenging skill in English. As she said she started writing at an early age in her family so this skill does not produce any difficulty for her. She is multilingual, knows Uzbek fluently, Russian conversational, basics in Tadjik and English.

Methodology
To gain clear and reliable data about the participant, the triangular approach (using two or more methods to collect data) has been applied:

- Individual interview
- Questionnaire
- Classroom observation
- Test
As a first step for getting acquainted with the participant I held an individual interview to know more about her. To analyze her linguistic characteristics I let her speak in the target language introducing her briefly. Questionnaire is more commonly used by teachers in educational settings as it is easy to prepare and reveals much about learners (Elley, 1984). The methods in this small scale research involves questionnaire as well which was helpful to identify learning styles, strategies of the learner. The characteristics of each learning style are also defined in the questionnaire and they were of two types: multiple choice questionnaires where student can choose one description only, the other requires to fill out the place to answer the question. Through the first week of the observation I learnt about her personality traits when she spoke to her peers, teachers, when she worked in groups, pairs. Test was aimed for assessing grammar skill in target language since it is fundamental skill in every language (Tollefson, 1995).

**Results and findings**

This needs analysis is conducted through the methods mentioned above and provided enough information about the participant. As she mentioned in the interview, she is pursuing the profession that requires diverse languages to learn. Also, she wants her speaking, pronunciation skills improved via English lessons at school. English is a means of travelling to foreign countries; that is the foremost goal for learning languages.

By the help of questionnaire it is revealed that the participant is a visual learner who learns best with watching, observing. Pictures, videos, presentations, charts, diagrams are the essential tools for her learning. It is not fair to say that she learns only by seeing, acting and doing the tasks physically may help her to retain the information more deeply. However, there is high possibility that the amount of knowledge gained by listening can overweigh the amount of information retained by acting. We can see her attitude towards learning styles, their role in learning in the diagram below (Diagram 1).

**Diagram 1. Learning style**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning Style</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Visual</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Auditory</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kinesthetic</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Observation process lasted for one week during which I found out that she has strong self-esteem, confidence to herself and she is extrovert who prefers not to avoid discussions, debates on any topics. It is worth saying that she is sometimes risk-taker. This personality trait was bad for her at times when there were tests and she had to be quick for the sake of time. To know her real language, more particularly, grammar knowledge I prepared multiple choice and written test in which she had to find correct answer from the multiple choice relying on her grammar knowledge and to put the words in the correct order to make sentences. The results showed that she needs grammar skill to improve. As a language teacher, I have realized that to motivate this kind of students in class I should integrate diverse methods, strategies during one lesson procedure not sticking only one. As she prefers discussions both in the group and individual
work, I find it essential to bring some topics that is worth to debate. Besides, her motivation to learn and as an extrovert person she can make others also participate actively. Another thing should be applied in class is to integrate more visuals, videos, OHP (overhead projectors) and presentations as she is more visual and auditory learner. They need to see more and listen to learn effectively.

Conclusion

Considering the results of this small scale needs analysis research, I have come to the conclusion that it is very essential to consider learners differences in language teaching as they own diverse personality traits, learning styles, various goals, motivation in language learning. This research has made me think carefully in conducting lessons and addressing integrated methods in teaching. Furthermore, the role of needs analysis is crucial in effective learning and teaching, it gives clear idea of what learners expect from the lesson and what teachers should or can do and what they cannot. From my viewpoint, the result of this small scale research cannot be the reason to apply exact methods in the classroom as it involves small size (only one learner) and I suggest implementing this needs analysis methods with larger group to gain reliable data in teaching.

Reference: