

Importance of Multi-Stakeholder Needs Analysis to Develop LSP Module: Migrant Workers' Module in Perspective

Debashismoy Dutta
and
Prabal Das Gupta

Lecturers, BRAC Institute of Languages
BRAC University, Dhaka

Abstract: *This paper reviews and reflects on the needs analysis conducted to develop a trade-specific Language for Specific Purposes (LSP) module for prospective migrant workers incorporating English-Bangla-Arabic in a tripartite collaboration with the International Labour Organization (ILO), Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training (BMET) and BRAC Institute of Languages (BIL). This paper explores the multifaceted nature of this needs analysis by asking some questions – what module, for whom, to serve what purpose, at what cost, under whose supervision, by whom and under what logistic setting. The analysis was carried out by observing classes and interviewing prospective migrant workers at Technical Training Centres (TTCs), interviewing the TTC instructors, conducting focus group discussions (FGD) with returnee migrant workers, sharing ideas with ILO personnel and advocacy groups such as BRAC Migration Program (MP). This process helped the researchers identify the target groups' fragmented knowledge about target discourse situations which was somewhat compensated by the experiences of returnees. The expertise of the instructors helped to categorize the typical strengths and weaknesses of target groups and under continuous efforts of ILO to enforce international best practices for a decent working environment for migrant workers. Taking into consideration the multiplicity of issues and various inputs from the stakeholders, this paper underpins the importance of a multi-stakeholder needs analysis for better comprehension of the target discourse situation and appropriate delivery of services with some suggestions for future LSP modules.*

Keywords: *trade-specific, LSP, multi-stakeholder, needs analysis*

Introduction

Language for Specific Purposes (LSP) is considered an effective approach to teaching-learning a new language for a need-specific purpose and is gradually taking over the general-needs approach to learning languages. These new LSP courses are different not only in their content but in every other possible aspect – starting from the financing authority, end-users, instructors, administrators to even the course or material designers. Hutchinson and Waters (1987) rightly remark that English is no longer deciding its future path but becoming subject to the expectations of the learners. While agreeing with this stand of the author we would attempt to add that learners alone are not the stakeholders to influence the destiny of an LSP course.

On another note, while these courses are bringing new opportunities, the diversity of issues is posing challenges to module development, especially to LSP practitioners. One of the challenges emanates from the overwhelming expectations from the financing organization, language learners, and government entities while the academic challenge is also there for the course designers. They need to keep themselves aware of the international best practices while making the modules context-specific, relevant, and learner-friendly. For achieving that end, LSP practitioners need to give special attention to the needs analysis (NA) process.

Background of the Study

Hutchinson and Waters (1987) refer to some major politico-economic developments in the world which engendered the growth of ESP as a strong branch of language teaching. They identify an “age of enormous and unprecedented expansion in scientific, technical and economic activity on an international level” (p. 6) during the post Second World War (WWII) context which resulted in a demand for “tailored-to-fit” (Belcher, 2006, p. 135) language skills. But their identification of the post WWII economic expansion does not necessarily restrict the growth of ESP/ LSP only to that context. New scenarios are evolving in every geographical context and LSP practitioners are trying to cope with those situations with necessary adaptation, omission, revision of the standard practices course design. Bangladesh, a highly populous, developing country with slow industrial growth, has long been exporting manpower to Middle Eastern countries on a large scale and trying increasingly to open up new markets for its young manpower. The growing demand for skilled manpower from the manpower-shortage countries is making pre-departure training in trade-skills and in language a compulsory phenomenon. These issues result in LSP courses, both in English and Arabic, for the prospective migrant workers of Bangladesh because competence in the target language is a deciding factor in being selected for overseas jobs and it helps to reduce exploitation and increase the possibility of safe migration. Lack of trade skills and gaps in target language competence have always been obstacles for the Bangladeshi migrant workers to get a competitive salary abroad while migrant workers from other Asian competitors are quite well-paid and also have the bargaining power. Moreover, the aforementioned incapacities of the migrant workers lead to various sorts of extortion by middlemen and recruiting agencies at home and employers abroad.

All these issues led ILO to develop trade-based language modules for the prospective migrant workers of Bangladesh in four trades, namely housekeepers, care providers, electricians, and construction workers, which will be delivered in the TTCs under the Bureau of Manpower, Training and Employment (BMET). BRAC Institute of Languages (BIL), BRAC University acts as the service provider in this tripartite collaboration.

Research Questions

The study aims at finding answers to following research questions:

- a) What are the roles of different stakeholders in the needs analysis of an LSP course?
- b) How do the interests of the stakeholders complement each other?

Literature Review

Hutchinson and Waters (1987) give supreme importance to the issue of identifying learner needs before designing any ESP course. They also suggest that course designers know the ethnographic background of the learners. Belcher (2006) says, “It is probably no exaggeration to say that needs assessment is seen in ESP as the foundation on which all other decisions are, or should be, made.” David M. Litwack (1979) gives us a six-step model for developing ESP courses and keeps “Analyze trainee and job needs” (p. 384) at the top of the list. Though the model was given for developing ESP modules, it can be used with contextual variations to develop any LSP module. Any fault resulting from the miscomprehension of the first step, namely analyze trainee and job needs, will increase difficulty in all the later steps of Litwack’s model. Kourilova (1979) advises that the course designers gather information objectively. The author, moreover, observes that the information collected and assessed objectively helps the researchers focus to develop content which will be appropriate for the target group. On the other hand, Robinson (1991, as cited in Benesch, 1996) argues that needs analysis is “influenced by the ideological preconceptions of the analysts” (p. 724) and Brindley (1989) also refuses to acknowledge any “objective reality” of the NA, as cited in Robinson (1991, p.7).

To enquire into the target needs, course designers usually consider the needs in “an objective sense” (Hutchinson and Waters, 1987) and the real learners’ involvement in the process plays an important role in maintaining

objectivity. However, the learners have their own limitations if we consider the situation of migrant workers. In this case, migrant workers often have very little knowledge of the target job and discourse situation. Thus, a segmented view with various limitations may come out from one stakeholder group which must be addressed by the valuable input from a different stakeholder. Hutchinson and Waters (1987) refer to the “conflicting perceptions” which the learners and the course designers or teachers may have regarding their “idea of the necessities” and “view as to their lacks” (p. 56). Again, Litwack (1979) proposes to do a task analysis of the target learner group to “set the priorities of language skill needs: oral versus written, or receptive versus productive skill needs” (p. 384).

To gather objective and authentic data on learners’ target needs, Hutchinson and Waters (1987) prefer more than one method – questionnaires, interviews, data collection, and informal consultations with sponsors, learners, and others. Many experts in this field propose the importance of both the quantitative and qualitative data from multiple sources to develop an effective and purposeful LSP course and functioning teaching materials. The authors recommend that the course designer apply at least two or three of the aforementioned methods. For accumulating information, the course designer needs to know why the language is needed and how the language will be used. The authors also suggest that the course designer find out what the content areas will be to analyze the target situation. It is equally significant to know with whom the learners will use the language, in what context and where. After receiving the answers of the queries from different sources, the course designer needs to analyze learning needs. For analyzing learning needs, Hutchinson and Waters (1987) propose a framework that includes a set of questions such as why the learners are taking the course and how the learners learn.

Methodology

This research was conducted in multiple institutional settings which helped the researchers access all the involved stakeholders to understand target-language needs and also to enrich the input for appropriate course design. Qualitative data have been collected through meetings with ILO, the financing authority, TTC principals and instructors of Bangladesh-Korea Technical Training Centre (BKTTTC) and Sheikh Fazilatunnesa Mujib Mahila Technical Training Centre (SFMMTTC) while quantitative data has been collected from thirty-three TTC instructors of Bangladesh. Focus group discussions with the returnee migrant workers was arranged by BRAC Migration Programme and Nagar Daridra Bostibashi Unnayan Sangha (NDBUS), both of which are advocacy groups working to ensure safe migration policy in Bangladesh. BKTTTC and SFMMTTC were given priority considering multiple issues for all the stages of the pilot phase: suggestions from ILO, proximity of the TTCs from BRAC University, target group availability, and the quality of the facility. The final reason for prioritizing these TTCs was that newly developed LSP modules were supposed to be implemented in those two TTCs first. Interview sessions with a total four batches of learners were conducted in BKTTTC and SFMMTTC while the learners were receiving training with the existing training set up.

Findings

Data gathered from the interviews, focus group discussions, and meetings reveal some of the overarching perceptions of all the stakeholders. A few important but aforethought issues also came to light.

Interview with the instructors of different TTCs.

Question	Ans: a	Ans: b	Ans: c	Ans: d
1. Do you need to conduct English/ Arabic classes at the TTC?	23 (Yes)	10 (No)		
2. Do you have any prescribed text in English/ Arabic?	7 (Yes)	16 (No)	10	
3. How often do you conduct English/ Arabic class in a week?	13 (1/week)	3 (2/week)	17 (3/week)	
4. What is the duration of each class?	33 (45 minutes)	1 hr (60 minutes)	90 minutes	

Question	Ans: a	Ans: b	Ans: c	Ans: d
5. What type of modules do you use to teach English/ Arabic?	- (Specific)	33 (Generic)		
6. Have you ever selected any trade-based (subject) content to teach English/ Arabic?	-	2 (yes)	31 (no)	
7. What is the regular class size?	30 (25-40)	3 (41-60)	(above 60)	
8. Which of the following materials do you have in your classroom?	33/33 (whiteboard)	6/33 (multimedia)	6/33 (TV)	6/33 (VCD)

Figure 1: Result of the interview with the TTC instructors

The total number of respondents in the interview was thirty-three trade-based instructors of TTCs who need to conduct language classes along with their regular responsibilities. Twenty-three respondents were conducting Arabic and English language classes at the time of interview with regular trade-based sessions. The remaining ten respondents had started conducting language classes. Seven respondents positively answered that they followed the prescribed language module in the classroom but that is a generic module. Other respondents admitted that they followed different modules chosen from the market. Thirty-nine per cent respondents confirmed that they took language classes once a week where fifty-one per cent respondents took sessions thrice a week. This frequency depends on the course duration and the importance given on language sessions for a trade. All the respondents conformed to the forty-five minute duration of a language class. But language courses for the trades of “care providers” and “housekeepers” are given much importance and are usually given more time. Two of the respondents replied positively to the issue of using trade-based materials in the language classroom. Ninety per cent respondents experienced regular class size of twenty-five to forty learners. Ten per cent of the respondents reports on class size of forty to sixty. Finally, they were asked the question on available teaching-learning and audio-visual materials in TTCs. All of them said that they had whiteboards in the classroom. But television and CD/DVD sets are not available in all the TTCs. Though language modules will be developed for four different trades, all the trades do not always remain in offer in all the TTCs. The TTC has set entry-level minimum academic qualifications for all four trades. The minimum academic qualification for the other three trades is as follows: Care Providers - SSC Graduates; Electrician - JSC graduates; Construction Workers - fifth grade graduates. Respondents are unanimous on the point that, housekeepers’ trade draws not only the lowest proficiency level participants, but also contains the mixed-ability learner group with wider gap than any other trade. Some highly qualified learners are often enrolled in the Electricians trade and in Care Providers trade while housekeepers’ trade gets some SSC graduates.

Meetings, interviews and FGD. Qualitative data from the interviews, meetings and focus group discussions brought some surprising issues. Some issues overlap with multiple stakeholders while some are unique. ILO personnel delineate in the meeting the rationale for being involved in the project and they clarified that the LSP course development is just a minor part of an umbrella project which includes many stakeholders. ILO personnel and TTC were quite aware of the mixed-ability training batches and agrees with the TTC instructors regarding the content-level difficulty. They propose to keep the average linguistic and cognitive competence in consideration for the course materials. Advocacy groups supported this with information of returnee migrant workers. They described the various ways of exploitation by recruiting agencies at home and by the employers in the foreign countries. Steps for legal migration are also highlighted by them.

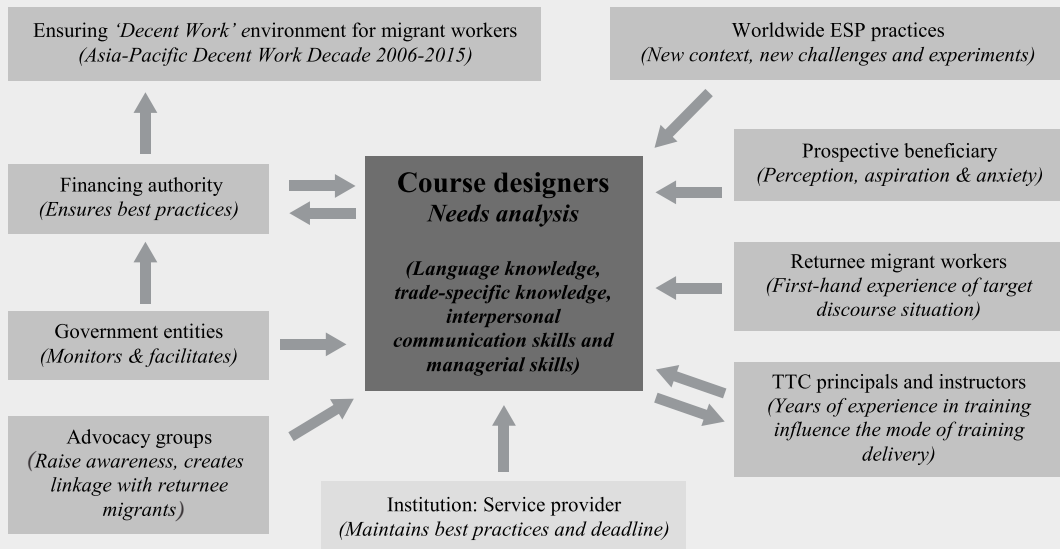


Diagram 1: Inter-stakeholder roles and relationships

The diagram on inter-stakeholder roles and relationships shows how all the aforementioned meetings and interviews between and among the stakeholders clarified the roles and responsibilities of each stakeholder which ultimately helped in the later steps of the LSP module development activities.

An FGD session was arranged with six female returnee migrant workers who opened up the treasure of their first-hand experiences and sufferings in foreign countries. Only one returnee, out of the six attendees, could recollect good memories from her first tenure in Saudi Arabia. Other five attendees described horrific stories of their sufferings. Three of the attendees received language training in Arabic before being recruited. But outright rejection of the training was evident as they gained no benefit from it. This interview helped the module developers to realize that the target discourse situation will mainly be monologue-based or dialogic where short responses from the migrant workers would often suffice to complete the communication as they will remain on the receiving-end of the commands of their employers.

All the stakeholders, involved in the needs analysis process helped the course designers to identify the target needs for the learners of each trade. Suggestions, feedback from ILO and advocacy groups helped the course designers to realize safe migration related issues. They also gave input on different steps of safe migration, importance of legal money transfer, and adaptation approach to the culture shock in a foreign country. Interview of the TTC instructors provided authentic states of logistic setting in all the TTCs because one objective of the project was to replicate the language manuals in all the TTCs of the country. Instructors of BKTTTC and SFMMTTTC provided great insight into the content-knowledge and helped course designers prioritize contents. Experiences of the returnee migrants helped to identify roles of housekeepers and care providers in a foreign country. According to them, duties and responsibilities of these two trades often overlap. TTC instructors supported the experiences of the returnees and suggested keeping basic housekeeping related contents in the module of the care providers. The provision in the project was for two separate modules, namely Arabic-Bangla and Bangla-English. This provision has been changed, sequencing the languages in English-Bangla-Arabic in the same manuals.

Recommendations

Hutchinson and Waters (1987) focus on knowing the ethnographic details of the learners. Besides assessing information on the learners' background, both the authors guided the course designers to investigate the

surroundings of the class. Thus, the study has emphasized on the importance of knowing the age, level of study, years of study gap, motivation, and logistic setting of the TTCs during needs analysis. Moreover, the study has identified one of the major challenges in engaging the trade-instructors in the language classroom. Though the instructors are competent in their respective subject contents, they are not well aware of pedagogy and practices of language teaching. Therefore, the study proposes to recruit teachers from the target-language background or to train the trade-instructors for facilitating language sessions. As mentioned earlier in the study, the learners are from a low language context. Therefore, this clearly suggests to the course designers to use simple semantic structures and important trade-specific lexis, which will be useful in the target discourse situation. Furthermore, the study recommended the development of audio-visual materials to complement the manuals and help the teachers to play the role of facilitator. This paper has suggested that the course designers choose eclectic methods to reach the objectives of any LSP course.

The roles and responsibilities of each stakeholder need to be properly identified and subsequently valued by all the parties but more specifically by the service providing institution. Moreover, relationships among all the parties need to be systematically maintained without hurting any stakeholder's sensitivities or reservations if there is any. This issue will be clearer if we consider the complex communication dynamics between public and private sector entities in Bangladesh. Designing relevant, trade-based LSP modules is, of course, of great importance. But developing a sense of ownership among all the stakeholders is equally important for proper implementation of the modules and for their eventual sustainability. New research scopes are there for finding out the subtleties of LSP module design where English is not the only concern but Arabic and languages of some other countries, where migrant workers from Bangladesh go fortune-hunting, are gradually becoming important.

Conclusion

At no point can the importance of needs analysis be put into question since it is the foundation for designing an LSP course. Though every LSP has some commonalities, they are significantly distinctive as well. The scenario varies from one LSP context to another LSP context. Earlier experience may somewhat help a course designer. However, it is better to be prepared to confront newer or even unexpected scenarios due to the interests of multiple stakeholders. Finally, this study has justifiably shown how the involvement of different stakeholders in needs analysis helped the course designers to develop effective and functional language manuals for each of the trades ensuring a sense of ownership among the stakeholders.

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