Time to deconstruct needs analysis?

Friday 21st April, 2023 – BALEAP conference

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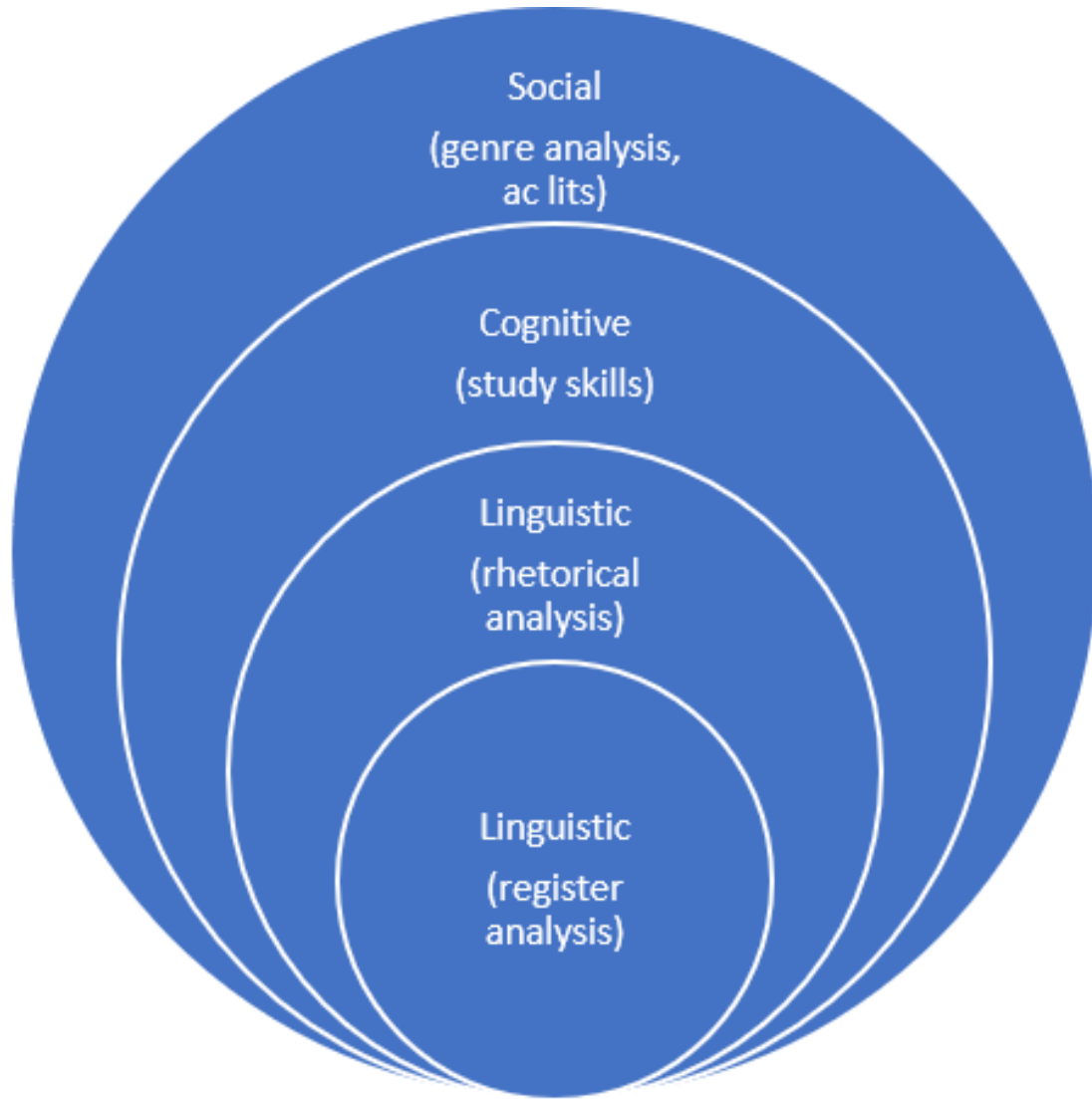
@RobPlayfair

Overview

- Aim of session
- Background:
  - Development of needs analysis in EAP
  - Examples of needs analysis studies
- Discomforting thoughts about needs analysis:
  - Rhetorical uses of the concept
  - Some reasons to deconstruct needs analysis
- Individual question formation → Small group discussion → Larger group discussion
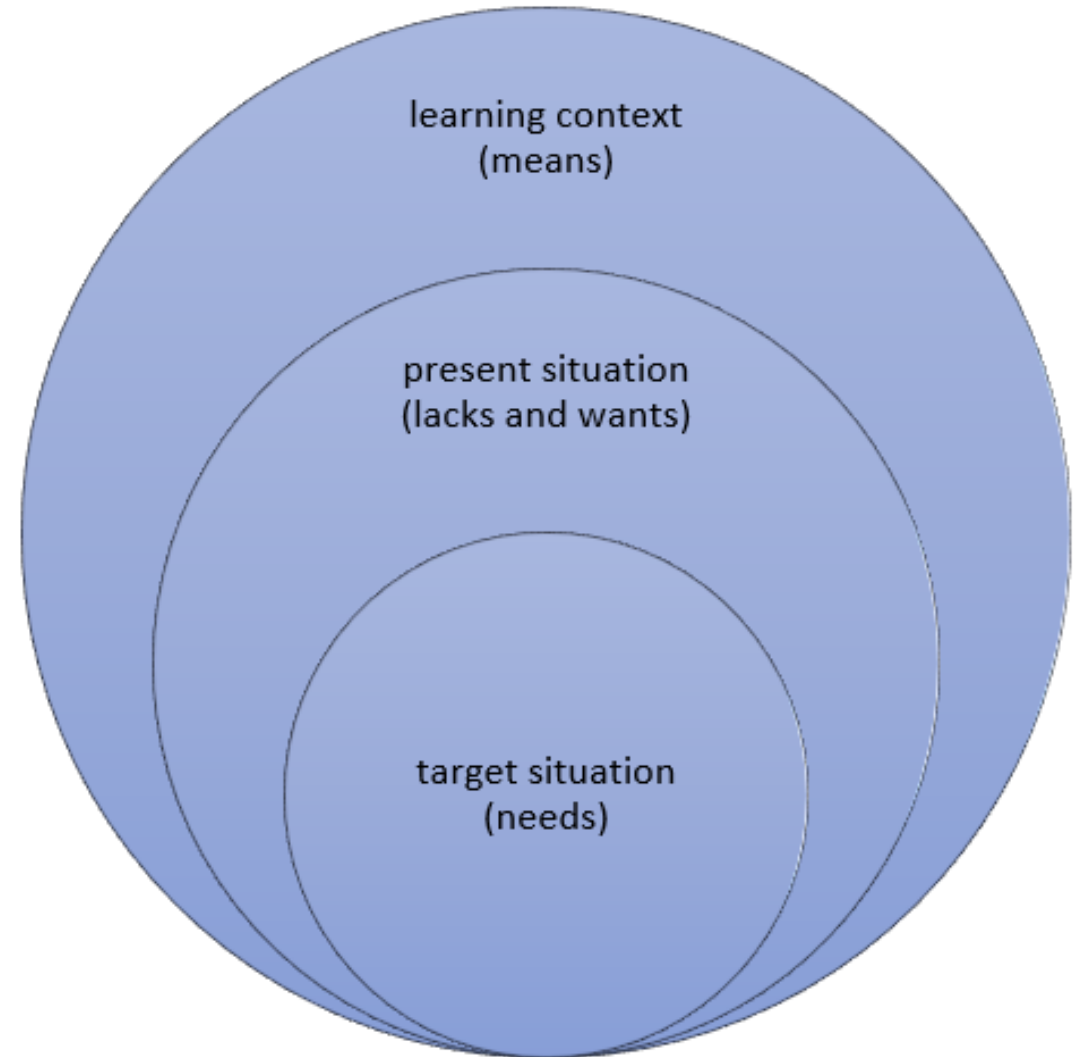
Development of needs analysis

Needs analysis is considered a course development process using a range of methods – such as questionnaires, interviews or textual analysis – and sources – such as students, teachers and texts – to identify the language and skills that are most relevant to a group of learners to be included in course design (Basturkmen, 2010).

EAP research research orientation

Social
(genre analysis,
ac lits)

Cognitive
(study skills)

Linguistic
(rhetorical
analysis)

Linguistic
(register
analysis)

Conceptual growth of Needs Analysis

learning context
(means)

present situation
(lacks and wants)

target situation
(needs)

Based on Benesch (2001)

Variations in (published) needs analysis

Target situation: Lecturer and professional perspectives (Deutch, 2003)

7. Rank the following genres of legal material by their order of importance for the English reading requirements in your courses. (Mark 1 as the most important and 5 as the least important).

court decisions _____
legal articles _____
books _____
legislation _____
legal documents _____

"The relative amount of course time allocated to [the genres] should correspond to the importance attributed to them by the lecturers' rankings." (p.137)

legal documents   legislation   court decisions   books   articles
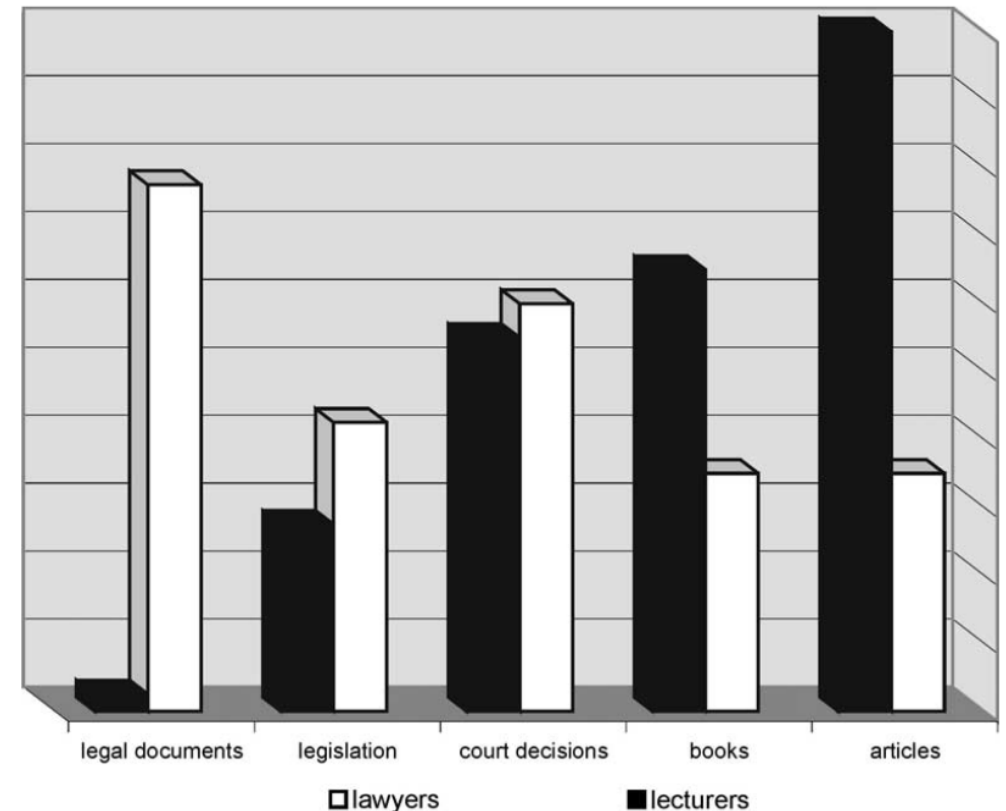
□ lawyers   ■ lecturers

Fig. 5. A comparison between lecturers' and lawyers' ranking of relative importance of different genres.

Present situation: Student focused large scale survey (Evans & Green, 2007)

Table 3
Level of difficulty of academic reading skills

Language/study skills	Easy (%)	Difficult (%)	Neutral (%)
Identifying supporting ideas/examples	25	23	52
Reading carefully to understand a text	22	25	53
Identifying key ideas	24	28	48
Understanding organisation of a text	20	27	53
Taking brief, relevant notes	21	28	51
Using own words in note taking	25	33	42
Reading quickly to get overall meaning	25	33	42
Reading quickly to find information	23	35	42
Working out meaning of difficult words	13	47	40
Understanding specialist vocabulary	11	53	36

Scale: 1 = Very difficult, 5 = Very easy.

"Put simply, inadequate receptive and productive vocabulary in English is <u>the main problem</u> confronting the almost 5000 students who participated in the survey. Clear pedagogical concerns emanate from the findings presented here: one is that <u>EAP programme design should place a great deal of stress on the teaching and learning of subject-specific and common core lexis</u>." (p.14)

Present-situation: Learner-initiated puzzles (Banister, 2021)

Prompt question: 'What puzzles you (i.e., what would you like to better understand) about learning English, and in particular, about academic English?'

Using diaries, group discussion, webquests based on puzzles over an EAP course.

Teacher analysis of data

"After the first run of the module, we were considering changing the oral presentation assessment component to a reading-into-writing task. However, the surprising amount of puzzling about speaking skills prompted a reassessment. Learner puzzling in this area suggested that it was a want (and for some also a lack) and this contributed to our retention of the oral component." (p.6)

Discomforting thoughts about needs analysis

Rhetorical uses of 'needs' in EAP discourse

To sell EAP products

"The course is <u>tailored to your needs and the needs of your students</u> thanks to the <u>extensive market research</u> we have carried out with a global panel of ELT professionals. By <u>listening to the needs</u> of the teacher and student, we have developed a highly robust course."

(web advertising for Unlock coursebook, CUP)

To position EAP practice in HE

"<u>EAP is very target orientated […] We are teaching skills, and these skills are related to HE. These are necessary</u> to be able to study successfully; that's the point of it […] but I don't think it puts us on a par with somebody who does research into psychology or physics."

Participant cited in Taylor (2022)

To position EAP practice in society

"We should be 'in solidarity' with our students <u>and their needs, as professionals</u>. We should not be closing down conversations nor <u>pushing a dubious revolutionary political agenda</u>."

(BALEAP JISCmail thread, 13th April, 2023)

Some reasons to deconstruct needs analysis

- **NA as static**: "…like the constantly changing learning targets [ESP] addresses, is itself becoming harder and harder to capture in anything like a single stop-action frame" (Belcher, 2006, p. 134)

- **NA as based on deficit**: "By ignoring socio-semiotic and multimodal research on literacy development, for example, which approaches writing instruction as part of a complex educational ecology that cares about and integrates students' previous and current literacies into the acquisition of new ones…, EAP projects itself as a perpetrator of functional transferable skills continually aimed at future 'target situations'" (Molinari, 2022, p.41)

- **NA as neutral**: "…to arrive at an ethics of EAP, needs analysis must include examination of who sets the goals, why they were formulated, whose interests are served by them, and whether they should be challenged." (Benesch, 2001, p. 43).

- **NA as an exclusive practice**: "EAP course design is a high stakes activity usually <u>carried out by senior members</u> of the EAP team, who can interact with staff in their institution to establish the expectations of the academic community that EAP students wish to join. This target needs analysis supports the development of a 'defensible syllabus' for the course…" (BALEAP, 2022, p. 8)

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