



Critical Task-based Needs Analysis for Empowering Adult Immigrant Learners



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Study Overview

Critical needs analysis (NA) recognizes that NAs are subjective and political, and that power differentials exist across multiple sources (Benesch, 1996). This poster reports on the results of a critical NA of adult students' task needs in an advanced ESL class at a community school. Adult ESL immigrant programs have the potential of fostering individuals' self-positioning as active members of their adopted communities. To fulfill an empowering role, they would benefit from both task-based and critical approaches to education. The two strands emphasize that students' needs should be at the heart of the curriculum. We propose multilayered integration of NA and collaboration with students in developing curriculum and instruction at the classroom level.

Task-based Critical Pedagogy

(Konoeda & Watanabe, forthcoming)

Critical Pedagogy

Educational purposes

- ❖ Develop an alternative to oppressive beliefs and practices, and achieve critical consciousness.
- ❖ Build language to express the critical knowledge and to take social action.

Operationalization

- ❖ Expose students to multiple perspectives by challenging ideologies and practices considered oppressive.
- ❖ Engage learners in critical dialogue that problematize issues in the students' daily lives.

NA method

Students' needs and concerns are extracted through ongoing teacher-student dialogues (Auerbach & Wallerstein, 1987; Freire, 1970).

Task-based Critical Pedagogy

Task-based Language Teaching

Educational purposes

- ❖ Build skills and knowledge necessary to function in society as a language user by "doing" language.

Operationalization

- ❖ Structure curriculum/syllabus based on needs identification and analysis of target tasks.
- ❖ Sequence pedagogic tasks in increasing cognitive complexity, leading to the target task. Tasks should allow students to shift their attention to the incomprehensible linguistic features.

NA method

NA via multiple methods and sources is the basis for identifying target tasks and creating pedagogic tasks (Long, 2005). Many NAs in TBLT framework identifies real-world tasks.

Critical Task-based Needs Analysis Methodology & Results

Participants: The advanced tuition-free ESL class met 2.5 hours a night, four nights a week. Daily attendance ranged from 3 to 12 students. The majority of learners were females, employed full-time in entry level positions.

Learner Needs Analysis Data (themes & quotes)

• Culture and power differences:

"My boss wants me pick some vegetables and meats from his lunch box. I feel so uncomfortable at that time because it is not usual in my country. I hope I can refuse it but I thought he is boss, so I took some from his lunch box, but I feel so strange in my heart."

• Family values:

- Parenting, child responsibility, relationship with in-laws, etc.
- **Gender roles and discrimination:** Glass ceilings (salaries, job status, responsibilities).
- **Language use in family:** Heritage language versus English
- **Co-workers' personal stories:** Drug use, homelessness, etc.
- **Participating in community services:** Submitting quarter designs, volunteer work, etc.
- **Community resources:** Getting a state ID and driver's license, voting

• Linguistic:

Differences in pronunciation (e.g., where/were; fool/full). Idioms and expressions they encountered.

• Discriminatory remarks:

Generalizations (e.g., Americans like to have many credit cards).

• Communication at work:

Request for time off from work, clarification request on phone to get message correctly, ordering via email versus phone, etc.

• Bullying:

"[My co-worker] like to bully me because I don't speak good English"

• NNS Identity:

"Do I need to apologize for my English?"

• NS expectations/perceptions:

"Americans don't have patience to listen to you."

• NNS dependence:

"I remember just an [airport] agent talking to me and carrying my pet. I tried to say to her I didn't want to get my pet alone. I tried but I couldn't. My husband (who is a native speaker) usually help me, so I was really lost."

• Situational/cultural pragmatics:

"What American do to show condolence to the husband? I want to express my sympathy."

• Course purpose

"Enable learners to improve their quality of life, by identifying their social concerns and addressing linguistic and cultural understanding."

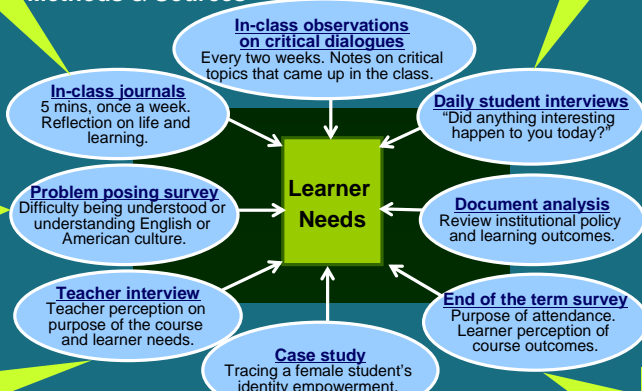
• Teacher perception on learner needs

Skills: Questioning, politeness, verb tenses, pronunciation, interpersonal communication

Disposition: Agency and independence, risk taking, open-mindedness (acceptance of diversity), etc.

Knowledge: Government, health, civics, local culture and multiculturalism, exploring life options

Methods & Sources



Institutional mission, goals, and learning outcomes are aligned with state-wide "General Learner Outcomes" and National Institute for Literacy's "Equipped for the Future Standards for Adult Literacy and Life Long Learning" (1999, see below diagram).



End of the term survey (N = 7)

• Top 3 class outcomes:

(strongly disagree = 1, strongly agree = 4)

- The class gave me support and encouragement about the problems in my daily life. (M = 3.80)
- My classmates' opinions gave me opportunities to think about myself (M = 3.60)
- The class helped me to be more confident in English (M = 3.60)

• How different is this class from others?

- More interactive (N = 5): "we all got involved in class"
- Transformation (N = 3): "It was interesting how we did all the evolution of our self in class"
- Enhanced learning outside the class (N = 3)

• Role of class in students' life:

- Language learning (N = 7)
- Make friends and socialize (N = 5)
- Learn different culture from peers (N = 4)
- Safe learning environment (N = 3)
- Improve professional & personal life quality (N = 3)
- Confidence building (N = 2)
- Solving daily problem (N = 2)

PROFILE OF STUDENT A

- A female student
- Lives with her Spanish speaking in-laws. Her in-laws do things for her all the time.
- Work: Salad bar at a restaurant (rarely communicates with NS of English).
- Long-term goal: Become an architect.
- Immediate goal: To be more independent, and do things for herself as she did in Peru.

ISSUE

"I don't understand what some people say to me. How do you ask them to repeat?"

PEDAGOGIC TASK

In pairs, one gives oral directions and other draws a map. Check for understanding by repeating information using "So, you mean..."

REAL LIFE OUTCOME

Success finding the doctor's office in the hospital without her family's help. She realizes that she can do things on her own with her English

"I got lost in hospital. I didn't want to be late. I asked many people for help. Finally, I get my appointment. I was so happy. I'm proud of myself." (Interview data) → empowerment of her linguistic self-esteem.

Discussion and Conclusion

The above diagram shows emerging themes. However, it was only through critical methods, such as dialoguing and in-class interviews, that learners had the opportunity to reveal deeper, higher stakes issues. For example, a student asked about American names, but dialoguing uncovered the fact that she lost her job because she inaccurately recorded a customer's name, and that she was more interested in how to ask for clarification of information, so as to not make the same mistake and keep her job. Therefore, it is imperative that educators keep in mind that task development, whether it be primarily linguistically or otherwise motivated, may involve more complex intra- and interpersonal issues.

While international students' needs in academic institutions are mostly constrained by top-down, academic standards, immigrant student needs in community adult schools tend to be less academic and not easily identified through a surface level inventory. Consequently, this study demonstrated that a bottom-up, critical needs analysis requires instructors to create a safe space for learners to voice their concerns thereby identifying some of this growing population's more pressing needs. In sum, linguistic, social and cultural competence are intimately intertwined, so issues of identity, empowerment and pragmatics cannot be teased out of the language classroom.

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