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Assessing Iraqi EFL learners' Needs, Wants and Lacks in the EFL Curriculum

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تقييم احتياجات ورغبات ونواقص متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلفة أجنبية في المنهج الدراسي للغة الإنجليزية في العراق

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Abstract

This research focuses on needs analysis as a crucial step in designing an effective EFL curriculum. Although Iraqi university students begin learning English early, they still face difficulties in grammar, language use, and comprehension. Many learners feel a gap between their expectations and the current state of EFL instruction in Iraq. To address this, the study developed a structured Needs Analysis questionnaire based on Hutchinson and Waters' (1987) Target Needs Framework to identify learners' needs, wants, and lacks. A descriptive quantitative approach was employed, surveying 83 fourth-year undergraduate EFL students at Al-Anbar University during the 2024–2025 academic year. The collected data were analyzed using SPSS to provide descriptive statistics on learner perceptions. The findings reveal mismatches between the curriculum and learners' styles, particularly in receptive skills, teaching methods, content, and assessment practices. This highlights the urgent need to revise the curriculum to be more learner-centered, skills-balanced, and contextually relevant, supported by diversified and performance-based assessment methods. Keywords: Needs Analysis, EFL Curriculum, Assessment, Learning Styles, Teaching Methods

المخلص

تُعنى هذه الدراسة بتحليل الاحتياجات التي تعد خطوة ضرورية في تصميم منهج فعال لتعليم اللغة الإنجليزية كلفة أجنبية. وعلى الرغم من أن طلاب الجامعات العراقية يبدأون بتعلم اللغة الإنجليزية في وقت مبكر، إلا أنهم لا يزالون يواجهون صعوبات في فهم قواعد اللغة واستخدامها. حيث يشعر العديد من المتعلمين بوجود فجوة بين توقعاتهم والوضع الحالي لتعليم اللغة الإنجليزية كلفة أجنبية في العراق. ولمعالجة هذه المشكلة، قامت الدراسة بتطوير استبيان منظم لتحليل الاحتياجات استناداً إلى إطار الاحتياجات المستهدفة لهاتشينسون ووترز (١٩٨٧) بهدف تحديد احتياجات المتعلمين ورغباتهم وأوجه القصور لديهم. وتم اعتماد منهج وصفي كمي، حيث شمل الاستطلاع ٨٣ طالباً من طلاب السنة الرابعة في قسم اللغة الإنجليزية بجامعة الأنبار خلال العام الدراسي ٢٠٢٤–٢٠٢٥. وتم تحليل البيانات المستحصلة باستخدام برنامج الحزمة الإحصائية للعلوم الاجتماعية (SPSS) لتوفير إحصاءات وصفية عن تصورات المتعلمين. وتكشف النتائج عن وجود تناقضات بين المنهج الدراسي وأنماط تعلم المتعلمين، لا سيما في المهارات الاستقبالية، وطرق التدريس، والمحتوى، وأساليب التقييم. وهذا يسلط الضوء على الحاجة الملحة لمراجعة المنهج الدراسي ليصبح أكثر تركيزاً على المتعلم، ومتوازناً في المهارات، ومرتبطة بالسياق، ومدعوماً بأساليب تقييم متنوعة وقائمة على الأداء.

1.Introduction

A needs analysis is a vital component of systematic curriculum development, serving as the primary process for gathering information. This data collection is essential for determining the specific content and focus required to create an effective curriculum. (Alderson & Scott, 1992; Mackay & Bosquet, 1981), for curriculum change or improvement (Snow & Brinton, 1988), and for material development. These resources can guide the curriculum developers and teachers in establishing and improving the specific goals and contents of the curriculum as well as helping them select tasks and activities appropriate to the established goals. Every student who takes a course does so for a variety of reasons and with a variety of beliefs. Each course also has requirements that must be met before it can be taken. So, the course designers need to know how the courses will affect the students. It is important for them to know if the course is made for them or if they have to meet the requirements of the course

(Rowntree, 1981) Numerous scholars have emphasized the critical importance of analyzing learner needs, a principle established in the works of Munby (1981), Hutchinson and Waters (1987), Brindley (1989), and many others (e.g., Richterich and Chancerel, 1987; Berwick, 1989; Dudley-Evans and St. John, 1998). By figuring out what students actually need, language teaching becomes much more focused and effective. This process is not a one-time event; it can be useful at any point in a language program. When done at the start, it gives the teacher a clear picture of what each student already knows. If it happens midway through, it helps everyone see how much progress has been made and what the students are eager to learn next. Ultimately, when learners feel their teacher is invested in their specific goals, their own motivation to learn gets a significant boost. This understanding of student needs is invaluable, whether for building a new course from scratch or for improving an existing one. It essentially gets teachers and students on the same page. The learners' needs act as a guide for the instructor, helping them choose the right activities and content. In turn, when teachers clearly state their goals for a lesson, students get a much better grasp of the purpose behind the instruction, a dynamic that Nunan (1988) highlighted. At its core, a needs analysis is simply about figuring out the "what and how" of a language course, as Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998) put it. It involves a straightforward process: gathering information, analyzing it, and then actually using what you've learned. The main idea is to get a clear picture of what your students need *before* you design the course, which is especially vital for specialized classes like English for Specific Purposes (ESP). To get this information, you can use tools like questionnaires or simply talk to the learners in interviews. It is also incredibly helpful to observe students in the real-world settings where they will be using English, and to look at the kinds of articles they will read or conversations they will have. But it is not all technical; personal details like a student's attitude, their expectations, and their preferred learning style are just as important. In the end, this complete picture guides every decision, shaping both the course content and the way it's taught. To sum up, needs analysis is a vital facet of generating content and organizing classes as it assists with a variety of tasks. It assists students in determining the language abilities required to do specific tasks or achieve specific objectives, such as those required by sales managers, tour guides, or college students. Furthermore, it can determine if a present course fulfills the needs of its students well and assists in determining which kids in a group might need extra support with key language skills.

2. Research Questions

The ultimate objective of this research is to answer the following questions:

1. What are the EFL learners' needs, wants, and lacks in the EFL classes and are they prioritized in the current curriculum?
2. What gaps are present between the current EFL curriculum and the learners' needs?
3. To what extent are the current language teaching methods relevant to the learners' learning styles?
4. Which skill and/or learning activity should receive more focus in the EFL curriculum?
5. Are the current assessment methods valid enough to assess the EFL learners' needs?

3. Background and Definition of Needs Analysis

Michael West was the first to use the term "analysis of needs" in the field of language teaching in a survey report published in 1926 (White, 1988). The notion of "needs analysis" reemerged in the field of applied linguistics in 1970s due to comprehensive study conducted by the Council of Europe team. Their research concentrated on developing an innovative approach for instructing adult learners in primary European languages across Europe. The Council of Europe team thought that the best way to learn a language was to figure out precisely what the learner needed to do with the target language, not to master specific parts of the language. The team invented the name "Common Core." The common core stipulates that people who are learning a language have some things in common, even if they have different reasons for learning it (Johnson, 1982: 42). Then needs analysis was further strengthened by John Munby's groundbreaking work, *Communicative Syllabus Design*, published in 1978. Since then, needs analysis has changed significantly, going from more rigid synthetic-based methods to more dynamic process-oriented ones. Defining learner needs has been a long-standing goal for educators. Iwai et al. (1999) frame needs analysis as the essential information-gathering stage for developing a curriculum that is genuinely responsive to a student group. However, the concept is layered. Scholars like Brindley (1989) and Berwick (1989) draw an important distinction between the needs identified by an outside analyst and those expressed or experienced by the learners themselves. West's (1994) work offers a thorough exploration of the subject, covering its history and theoretical underpinnings in language teaching. Interestingly, Iwai et al. (1999) also observe that while formalized needs analysis is a relatively new tool in the field, its informal counterpart has always been part of a teacher's practice. Teachers have long made intuitive assessments of what their students

require to move forward. At its heart, this continuous effort to better respond to students is what has driven the evolution of teaching approaches over time, with new methods emerging to address needs more effectively. Akyl & Ozek (2010) explained that Need Analysis is a solid and effective instrument that assists teachers in clarifying the essential needs of students. This instrument opens possibilities for teachers to adjust the curriculum advancement that addresses the learners' interests. Therefore, Needs Analysis is a vital treasure for lecturers of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) to reveal students' pivotal requirements or necessities and determine the English skills they need to develop in order to succeed in the future. Benesch (2001: 72) argues that needs analysis is strongly related to the goal of learning, while Hutchinson and Waters (1991) consider learning needs as the needs of learner required during the learning process. According to Mahbub & Fauzi (2018) needs analysis is an important starting point in designing programs, materials, syllabus, etc. to suit student needs. Information about the needs of students can be used to develop the curriculum and teaching materials which in turn lead to the development of more motivating and useful programs (Crookes & Schmidt, 1991; Dooley, 2010). To sum up, Needs Analysis is a way to find out what knowledge learners need. Its goal is to set important learning goals and standards for how a course or learning activity should be designed and taught. The wants are related to the students' traits, worries, and possible limitations. The analysis tries to find methods and materials that can meet these needs. This helps find out if the design is right for the goals that were set. To put it another way, needs analysis includes doing some kind of activity with a learner to find out what their learning needs are. Knowing what those needs are can help you plan a good course. It can be seen that the purpose of NA is to enable the language instructors to translate the students' needs into linguistic and pedagogical terms in order to design and teach an effective course.

4. Needs Assessment

The first step in designing any EFL course is "Needs Assessment." The goal of this step is to find out why a certain group of students want to use the target language. This is done through a series of steps that give the teacher information about the students. These steps do not always follow a "linear" pattern (Flowerdew, 2013: 325). Nunan (1988: 20) believes that humanistic education draws on the view that "learners should have a say in what they should be learning and how they should learn it." Besides, this will encourage autonomous learning as well as efficiency in resource-limited contexts in which independent learning is an asset. Needs analysis can be done in a number of ways, and the type of information gathered frequently depends on the method chosen. Since it is probable that any single source of information will be incomplete or partial, a triangular approach (i.e., the collection of information from two or more sources) is recommended (Richards, 200: 59). The needs assessment should be conducted using a specific series of steps. The results of your needs assessment will be reliable and beneficial if you employ methods and processes that have been demonstrated to be highly valid and reliable (Witkin & Altschuld, 1995). That is why Hutchinson and Waters clearly stress this point "tell me what you need English for and I will tell you the English that you need". As a result, needs assessment is critical for the practice of specific-purpose teaching (1987: 8) In order to figure out what area of the program needs improvement, it requires one to engage in an on-going evaluation of and reflection on the findings about pedagogy and management. Curriculum evaluation monitors and reports on the quality of education. It is evident from the definition that the initial and ongoing process of curriculum development is reliant on the analysis of requirements.

5. Classifications of Needs analysis

Scholars hold differing perspectives on the categorizing of needs. Below is a review of the main classifications of needs proposed by various scholars. The following are the main types of needs analysis.

5.1 Pre-Course and On-Course Needs Analysis

Needs analysis can be conducted through two processes: one before the course begins (pre-course needs analysis) and one during the course (on-course needs analysis)

- **Pre-Course needs analysis:** this process is carried out to determine the objectives (goals) for which a specific learning program should be created. A Pre-Course Needs Analysis is undertaken before to the start of a language course to obtain vital information that will help personalize the course to the learners' individual needs. It entails understanding learners' language backgrounds, ambitions, and expectations, as well as their motivations for learning the language. It also evaluates their current skills and performance levels in areas including speaking, listening, reading, and writing. Pre course needs analysis instruments designed to reveal learner perceptions of their language needs have included: questionnaires, interviews, and self-evaluations.

• **On-course needs analysis** is just as important to make sure that the learner's needs are met as they come up. Based on (Richards, 2001). The needs analysis process should be continuing, even after the course has begun. On-course needs analysis is continuously monitoring learners' progress, receiving regular feedback on the course, and adapting to the learners' changing needs. This may entail revising course content, changing teaching tactics, and resolving any issues that develop during the learning process. Identifying faults and areas for growth as the course progresses allows educators to keep the learning experience relevant, interesting, and effective.

5.2 Objective and Subjective Needs

Objective needs and subjective needs can be seen as another way to group different types of needs. These ideas were put forward by Brindley (1989) and Robinson (1991). Subjective needs are those that can be figured out from "factual information" about learners, like how well they spoke the language in class, how hard they thought it was for them, and how much they needed to use language in real life (Brindley, 1989). So, objective needs can be perceived as those that can be found by looking at clear, observable information about the situation, the learner, the language they need to learn, and their current level of skill and proficiency (Brown, 1995). While objective needs relate to the content of instruction, subjective needs come from the students themselves and affect how they are taught and what they are taught. Teachers can identify learners' objective needs by analyzing their biographical information, including age, gender, nationality, marital status, educational background, previous language courses, current language proficiency, linguistic patterns, challenges with learning foreign languages, and current or future career. Subjective needs relate to learners' needs based on their "affective and cognitive factors". Brindley (1989) identifies characteristics such as learners' personality, self-confidence, cognitive styles, expectations, and self-esteem that impact their learning process. Subjective needs include learning preferences and style, aptitude, motivation as well as the use of learning strategies.

5.3 Target Situation Analysis (TSA)

The target situation refers to the context in which language learners will utilize the language they are acquiring (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). TSA is a form of needs analysis that primarily concentrates on the requirements of students upon completion of a language course (Robinson, 1991). The "target needs" are the "product" of a target situation analysis. All ESP practitioners agree that Munby was the first specialist to develop systematic and influential concepts concerning target situation analysis. He developed the well-known "Communication Needs Processor (CNP)," which includes a series of questions concerning essential communication characteristics (subject, participants, medium, etc.) (Munby, 1981). The two components of needs analysis in the model are learning needs and target situation needs. The "necessities," "lacks," and "wants" are examples of target needs. "Necessities" are dictated by the goal situation's requirement. These are the prerequisites that allow the learner to function well in the intended setting. "Lacks" are the discrepancy between "necessities" and the learner's current ability, or what they already know. "Wants" are the subjective wants of students, which are unrelated to the objective needs that instructors and course designers observe. Conversely, learning needs are the means by which students acquire the language. Wants can be referred to as desired knowledge, while necessities are required knowledge and lacks can be loosely considered as present knowledge (Macalister and Nation, 2009: 25). Hutchinson and Waters (1987) identified three facets:

- **Necessities:** Necessities are "what the learner has to know in order to function effectively in the target situation. For students to succeed in a specific discourse community domain, they must first acquire the necessary language, information, and discourse.
- **Lacks:** Lacks are the "necessities the learner lacks". These are the language, knowledge, and discourse that learners are already familiar with and must acquire in order to effectively function within the target discourse community domain.
- **Wants:** Wants deal with "what the learners want or feel they need". This includes students' opinions on the matter, their desires, motivation, attitudes, and interests, as well as their individual motivations for learning and learning preferences. The goal of this perception or felt need is to acknowledge the active responsibilities that students play in identifying their needs.

In terms of target needs, learners are a crucial component of course design, and information should be gathered not only about them but also from them. Objective needs are sometimes considered, but they may fail if they do not include the learners' subjective requirements. Sometimes there is a problem with motivation or conflict in learners' goals for taking a particular course (Hutchinson and Waters 1987). As a result, learners can contribute to the requirements analysis research by expressing their preferences for learning styles and approaches.

5.4 Present Situation Analysis

While Target Situation Analysis looks into the learner's goals, which are necessary for designing a course that helps them attain those goals, Present Situation Analysis (PSA) examines the learner's current position and identifies the gap between the present and the target. It determined the learners' level of language development, and the sources of information were the students themselves, the teaching establishment, and the "user institution," such as a place of employment, sponsoring body, and so on. Data was acquired using surveys, questionnaires, and interviews. Richterich (1977) came up with the Present Situation Analysis (PSA) method, which was not the same as the goal situation analysis. The learner was central to the system, which incorporated the surrounding community and culture. PSA investigates students' language proficiency at the start of a language course, as well as their strengths and weaknesses (Robinson, 1991). his method isn't just about textbooks; it considers the whole context—the learner's current abilities, the community they will be part of, and the cultural norms they'll encounter. For a quick and reliable measure of their current language skills, standard placement tests are the go-to tool. A learner's past information, such as her degree of schooling or years of English study, might also provide insight into her current abilities in the target language.

5.5 Pedagogic Needs Analysis

West (1998) developed the term 'pedagogic needs analysis' as a way to group together the three parts of needs analysis below. He discusses the inadequacies of target needs analysis which should be fixed by gathering information about the students and the learning setting. The phrase "pedagogic needs analysis" can mean any of these: deficiency analysis, strategy analysis or learning needs analysis, and means analysis.

- **Deficiency Analysis:** Deficiency analysis can be used to reflect the definition of lacks as defined by Hutchinson and Waters (1987). Additionally, learners' current needs or desires can be referred to as the analysis of learners' deficiencies or lacks. It is clear from the previous discussion that the best way to get from point A (present situation) to point B (target situation) is through deficiency analysis. Always keep the learner's needs in mind. As a result, deficiency analysis can serve as the "foundation for a language syllabus" (Jordan, 1997), as it should include data on the gap between present and target extralinguistic information, control of general English, language abilities, and learning techniques.

- **Strategy Analysis or Learning Needs Analysis:** Hutchinson and Waters (1987) argue that basing a course design solely on target objectives is always inadequate. The needs, possibilities, and limits (learning situation) of the route must also be considered. Learning implies consideration of the lacks-necessities route. Learning needs identify the learner's preferable learning styles and strategies, which include subjective, felt, and process-oriented needs (Allwright, 1982). In other words, this strategy aims to find out how students desire to learn rather than what they need to learn (West, 1998) and emphasizes methodology (Nunan, 1988). A learning situation analysis (LSA) provides information on the subjective or felt requirements of the learners, as per Dudley-Evans and St John (1998). It also looks at the process-oriented needs of the language learners, like what they think language learning is and what the best ways are for them to learn a foreign language.

- **Means Analysis:** The purpose of means analysis is to examine the considerations that Munby neglects (West, 1998), specifically the logistics and pedagogy that caused a debate regarding the practicalities and constraints of implementing needs-based education language courses (West, 1994). Data collected subjectively or objectively from learners regarding their interest and motivations for taking a course, or topics to be studied, is useful, but it is insufficient if utilized alone. Data should also be collected on the learners in relation to the context in which they are learning or applying their knowledge.

Numerous needs analysis techniques aim to address the needs of students in terms of instruction in new skills and evaluation procedures. According to Brown (2009), all methods overlap with one another.

6. John Munby's Model of Needs Analysis

One of the most influential needs analysis models is John Munby's. Munby's needs analysis model has paved the way for course designers to offer specialized courses in specific areas needed by the learner, while taking into consideration the functional specifications of the course, in his book *Communicative Syllabus Design*, which is the basis of Munby's approach to needs analysis. John Munby introduced his model by stating that, "One starts with the person (a language participant or category of participants) and investigates his particular communication needs according to the sociocultural and stylistic variables which interact to determine a profile of such needs." This profile is ultimately "...translated into the ESP specification that indicates the target communicative competence of the participant" (Munby, 1978: 32). Munby's Model is a form of Communication Needs Processor (CNP) that was developed to identify the practical communication requirements of students (1978). Munby's overall model consists of the following elements:

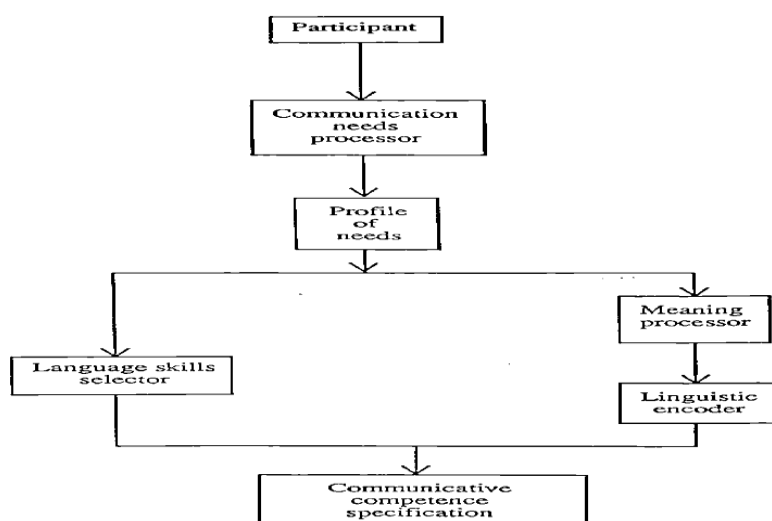


Figure (1) Munby's Model (1978) Needs Analysis Approach to Course Design

- **Participants:** this element seeks demographic information about the learners' identity and language: age, gender, nationality, current command of the target language, other languages known, and extent of command;
- **Communication Needs Processor:** this part examines certain communication requirements based on sociocultural and stylistic characteristics that interact to establish a profile of these needs;
- **Profile of Needs:** this is created by processing data in the CNP; 4. In the Meaning Processor, "parts of the socioculturally determined profile of communication needs are converted into semantic subcategories of a predominantly pragmatic kind and marked with attitudinal tone" (Munby, 1978: 42);
- **Meaning Processor:** "parts of the socioculturally determined profile of communication needs are converted into semantic subcategories of a predominantly pragmatic kind, and marked with attitudinal tone" (Munby, 1978: 42);
- **The Language Skills Selector:** this element identifies "the specific language skills that are necessary to realize the events or activities that have been identified in the CNP" (Munby, 1978: 40);
- **The Linguistic Encoder:** this encoder considers "the dimension of contextual appropriacy" (Munby, 1978: 49), once the encoding stage has been reached; and
- **The Communicative Competence Specification:** indicates the target communicative competence of the participant and is the translated profile of needs.

From Munby model's parts listed above, the Communication Needs Processor is the most important one as it provides a detailed description of specific communication needs. The factors that Munby (1987) lists are:

- **Purposive domain:** which refers to the type of ESP and the intended usage of the target language at the end of the course;
- **Setting:** is the psychological setting describes the different ways people will use English, and the physical setting describes the place and time where English will be used. the place where English will be used;
- **Interaction:** finds the learner's conversation partners and guesses how they will interact with each other;
- **instrumentality:** specifies the medium, which is whether the language to be used is written, spoken, or both; mode, which is whether the language to be used is in the form of monologue, dialogue, or any other form of communication; and the communication channel, such as face-to-face, radio, or any other method;
- **Dialect:** dialects that learners must comprehend or generate in terms of their spatial, temporal, or social characteristics;
- **Communicative event:** lists the things that the participants need to do to be effective or receptive; and
- **Communicative key:** the way in which participants must carry out the tasks that make up an event, such as respectfully or impolitely.

7. **Previous Studies** A good number of investigations have been conducted on needs analysis. This part focuses on the studies that have been conducted in the area of English teaching and learning context. Teresa Morell Molí's study (1999) examined EFL learners' language skills at the University of Alicante's English Studies Department; Suad Alhamlan's (2013) looked into what EFL learners need and what they think about the English curriculum; Svetlana Bogolepova's (2016) tracked the importance of textbook evaluation in identifying the specific needs of

learners and teachers in English for Academic Purposes (EAP) courses; GUO Hui's study (2017) analyzed the ESP learning needs; Aleksandra Łuczak's (2018) examined target language needs; Khawlah F. Aljouei & Yasser A. Alsuhaibani's (2018) "Traveller 5" assessed the English curriculum followed in Riyadh's third secondary schools; Fitrawati and Hermawati Syarif's study (2019) explored students' needs in learning advanced grammar and highlighted the gap between course goals and student achievement at Universitas Negeri Padang; Wenda Marlin Kakerissa, Nenden Sri Lengkanawati's study (2022) used a semi-open questionnaire to investigate the General English demands of students in the German Language Education Program; Nur Azmi Rohimajaya, Rudi Hartono, Issy Yuliasri, Sri Wuli Fitriati's study (2022) investigated the challenges, demands, and expectations of teachers and students when creating an English e-book based on the Merdeka Curriculum for Indonesian Senior High Schools; Ainan Salsabilla, Santi Andriyani, Andra Andriawan, Meli Indah Sugiarti's study (2022) investigated the English language demands of tenth-grade students studying Office Automation and Governance at a Vocational High School; Effrosyni K. Giannarou's study (2023) examined the English language requirements of adult graduates from Greek Merchant Marine Academies to find out the language skill levels, reasons for learning English, and variables that led to previous course dropouts; and Hee Jun Choi and Ji Hye Park's study (2023) that analyzed data using content, descriptive, and inferential approaches, drawing on numbers and statistics from questionnaires and surveys as well as some mixed and qualitative methodologies. The above studies have all emphasized the importance of continuous evaluation and a learner-centered approach when creating effective EFL, EAP, ESP and other related course materials, as lack of real-world, career-related communication skills were spotted. The results showed that students gave priority to English language proficiency that directly applied to their jobs, and the need for more thorough, stakeholder-inclusive evaluation techniques. The studies also showed lack of methodical methods and stressed the requirement of varying data gathering to increase the relevance and accuracy of learning needs evaluations. Moreover, these studies indicated that study programs need to be changed so that they better match the goals of the students. These findings led to meaningful revisions, including clearer guidance, more grammar and vocabulary activities, and a broader range of academic texts as well as group activities which can be viewed as a good way to build professional English for Specific Purposes (ESP) abilities related to their line of work. The present study attempts to design a Needs Analysis questionnaire to assess the needs, wants and lacks Iraqi EFL learners have so as to provide ideas for implementation in the EFL classroom by focusing directly on the source of the problem which is the gap between the present students' language level and the level they and their instructors and institutions desire to achieve in the future.

8. Research Design and Population Sampling

A descriptive quantitative approach, by means of a questionnaire will be applied for the execution of this study. The aim of this is to provide a clear vision of needs, wants, and lacks EFL learners have, and how to prioritize these needs in the English Language Curriculum.

8.1 Participants The participants in this study consisted of **undergraduate students** enrolled in the **Department of English Language at Al-Anbar University (Iraq)** during the academic year **2024–2025**. The total number of participants was **83 students**, all of whom were in their **fourth (final) stage** of study. This group was purposefully selected due to their extensive exposure to the department's full curriculum, making them well-positioned to reflect critically on the English language program's effectiveness in meeting their educational and professional needs. A purposive sampling technique was employed to ensure that the participants had sufficient academic experience and insight into the structure, content, and delivery of the curriculum. As final-year students, they were deemed the most capable of identifying the strengths and weaknesses of the program in terms of aligning with their actual needs, perceived lacks, and personal learning goals.

8.2 Sample Demographic Characteristics:

- **Age range:** Typically, 21–24 years
- **Gender:** Both male and female participants were included
- **Prior English learning background:** Students had varying levels of exposure to English before entering university, ranging from high school EFL classes to private courses or self-study, which was documented to help interpret variations in responses. This specific cohort was selected because the selected sample's cumulative academic journey allowed them to provide informed, experience-based feedback on the effectiveness of the department's curriculum in addressing their language learning needs, wants, and lacks. Their responses are therefore considered highly valuable for informing curriculum evaluation and future development.

8.3 Instruments

To collect the required data, the following DCT (Data Collection Tool) tool was utilized:

a. Questionnaire

A structured questionnaire was designed based on Hutchinson and Waters' (1987) **Target Needs Framework** (Needs = Lacks + Wants). It includes:

- **Section A:** Demographic information
- **Section B:** Perceived needs in language skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing)
- **Section C:** Learners' perceived lacks (areas of weakness)
- **Section D:** Learners' wants (preferences, interests, and goals related to learning English)

• Questionnaire Design

- The structured questionnaire employed in this study was designed in alignment with **Hutchinson and Waters' (1987) Target Needs Framework**, which conceptualizes "needs" as the sum of two core elements: **lacks** and **wants** (i.e., Needs = Lacks + Wants). This theoretical framework is widely used in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and language curriculum design to systematically identify what learners **require**, what they **do not yet possess**, and what they **aspire** to learn.

- The questionnaire consists of four main sections:

• Section A: Demographic Information

• Section B: Perceived Needs in Language Skills

• Section C: Learners' Perceived Lacks

• Section D: Learners' Wants

- Each item in sections A, B, C, and D is rated using a **five-point Likert scale** (ranging from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree), enabling quantitative measurement of participants' responses while maintaining flexibility for comparative analysis.

9. Validity and Reliability of the Instrument

To ensure the accuracy and consistency of the questionnaire employed in this study, several procedures were implemented to establish its validity and reliability. **Validity:** Content validity was established by consulting a panel of five experts specializing in English language teaching and curriculum design. These experts evaluated the questionnaire items for clarity, relevance, and their alignment with the core constructs of needs, wants, and lacks as outlined in Hutchinson and Waters' (1987) Target Needs Framework. Based on their constructive feedback, certain items were revised to enhance clarity and ensure cultural appropriateness. **Reliability:** The reliability of the questionnaire was examined through the calculation of Cronbach's Alpha coefficient to assess internal consistency. A pilot study was conducted with a sample of 20 students from a university different from the primary study site but possessing similar characteristics. The Cronbach's Alpha values obtained for the main sections were as follows: Perceived Needs: $\alpha = 0.87$ Perceived Lacks: $\alpha = 0.83$ Learners' Wants: $\alpha = 0.85$ These results indicate a high degree of reliability, confirming that the instrument consistently measures the intended constructs. Minor modifications were made following the pilot study to improve the wording of some items.

10. Statistical Analysis and Results Discussion

This section presents the statistical results derived from the questionnaire, followed by an analysis and discussion of what these figures reveal about the participants' perceptions. The quantitative data were analyzed using the *Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS)*, version XX, which was chosen for its accuracy and efficiency in handling educational research data. The analysis begins with a table summarizing the overall descriptive statistics, including the minimum, maximum, mean, and standard deviation for each item. This is followed by a more detailed interpretation of individual responses, which will help address the study's research questions and offer insights into learners' perceived needs, lacks, and wants.

Table (1) Overall Descriptive Statistics

		No. of participants	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
1	The level of English I had before entering the department wasn't enough to deal with the demands of the study.	83	2.0	5.0	3.795	.9208
2	My previous English learning experiences don't really match the current curriculum	83	2.0	5.0	3.639	.9700

3	I feel there's a clear gap between my current level and the target level in different language skills.	83	2.0	5.0	3.735	1.0369
4	I face difficulty / I need more practice in receptive skills (Listening and Reading).	83	1.0	5.0	4.193	1.0056
5	I'm learning English mainly for educational or other non-job-related purposes.	83	2.0	5.0	3.880	.9926
6	The course materials we use don't fully cover the basic needs I have as an English learner.	83	1.0	5.0	4.169	.9855
7	The curriculum doesn't give enough time to practice language skills.	83	2.0	5.0	3.578	.8988
8	What I really need to learn is not fully reflected in the syllabus.	83	1.0	5.0	3.819	1.0723
9	I think extra materials and teaching aids should be added to the courses.	83	1.0	5.0	3.602	.8401
10	Language skills are not taught in the way they should be.	83	1.0	5.0	3.807	1.1525
11	The number of English subjects in the curriculum is not enough to improve my skills.	83	1.0	5.0	3.928	.9077
12	I find literature subjects difficult and I need more support and practice in them.	83	1.0	5.0	3.265	1.1485
13	My preferred learning style does not match the teaching methods used in class.	83	2.0	5.0	3.940	.8315
14	The way English is taught now does not suit how I learn best.	83	1.0	5.0	3.386	.9478
15	The teaching methods used in EFL classes make learning English less engaging.	83	1.0	5.0	3.783	.9377
16	The current focus of instruction does not align with the practical language skills I need.	83	1.0	5.0	4.024	1.0704
17	Role-playing and speaking tasks are more helpful for me than traditional grammar exercises.	83	2.0	5.0	3.940	.8315
18	My previous English proficiency was not enough to match the current program.	83	2.0	5.0	3.964	.9032
19	Listening activities are more beneficial than other classroom activities.	83	1.0	5.0	3.506	.8464
20	Writing and vocabulary exercises are the most helpful for my learning progress.	83	1.0	5.0	3.494	1.2135
21	I struggle more with speaking and writing than with grammar or reading.	83	1.0	5.0	3.928	.9077
22	Receptive skills like listening and reading require more attention in the classroom.	83	2.0	5.0	3.940	.8315
23	reading require more attention in the classroom.	83	2.0	5.0	4.285	.7730

2 4	Grammar-focused activities are highly beneficial to my English language learning.	83	1.0	5.0	4.024	1.0704
2 5	Performing dialogues is more useful than grammar activities.	83	2.0	5.0	3.566	.8144
2 6	I prefer being assessed through assignments, classroom participation, and homework.	83	1.0	5.0	3.627	.8655
2 7	I prefer being tested through formal midterm and final exams.	83	1.0	5.0	3.988	1.1634
2 8	Current assessment methods do not fully reflect my language learning progress.	83	2.0	5.0	4.289	.7735
2 9	My English instructors need specialized training in language assessment techniques.	83	1.0	5.0	3.506	.8464
3 0	I am learning English primarily for job-related purposes.	83	2.0	5.0	3.964	.9032

The data in Table (1) indicates that Iraqi EFL learners at the tertiary level face noticeable gaps between their needs and the current curriculum. Learners report strong difficulties in receptive skills like listening and reading (Item 4: $M = 4.193$; Item 23: $M = 4.285$), and believe that course materials do not meet their basic needs (Item 6: $M = 4.169$). Many of them feel their previous English background is insufficient (Item 1: $M = 3.795$; Item 18: $M = 3.964$), and that the curriculum does not reflect what they actually need to learn (Item 8: $M = 3.819$). Teaching methods are often seen as misaligned with learning styles (Item 13: $M = 3.940$), and current assessment practices are viewed as ineffective in measuring real progress (Item 28: $M = 4.289$). **Table (2) Statistics of the Responses for Research Questions (1)**

			Mini	Maxi	Mean	Std. Deviation
1	The level of English I had before entering the department wasn't enough to deal with the demands of the study.	83	2.0	5.0	3.795	.9208
2	My previous English learning experiences don't really match the current curriculum	83	2.0	5.0	3.639	.9700
3	I feel there's a clear gap between my current level and the target level in different language skills.	83	2.0	5.0	3.735	1.0369
4	I face difficulty / I need more practice in receptive skills (Listening and Reading).	83	1.0	5.0	4.193	1.0056
5	I'm learning English mainly for educational or other non-job-related purposes.	83	2.0	5.0	3.880	.9926
6	The course materials we use don't fully cover the basic needs I have as an English learner.	83	1.0	5.0	4.169	.9855
			1.0	5.0	4.169	0.9855

The responses in Table (2) for research question (1) “**What are the EFL learners’ needs, wants, and lacks in the EFL classes and are they prioritized in the current curriculum?**” show that EFL learners struggle most with receptive skills (listening and reading), as indicated by the highest mean score ($M = 4.193$, $SD = 1.0056$), followed by concerns about the inadequacy of course materials in meeting their needs ($M = 4.169$, $SD = 0.9855$). Participants also reported feeling underprepared for their studies ($M = 3.795$, $SD = 0.9208$) and noted a clear gap between their current level and the target level ($M = 3.735$, $SD = 1.0369$). There was also a reported misalignment between their prior learning experiences and the current curriculum ($M = 3.639$, $SD = 0.9700$). Most students are learning English for educational purposes rather than employment ($M = 3.880$, $SD = 0.9926$).

Table (3) Statistics of the Responses for Research Questions (2)

			Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation
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7	The curriculum doesn't give enough time to practice language skills.	83	2.0	5.0	3.578	.8988
8	What I really need to learn is not fully reflected in the syllabus.	83	1.0	5.0	3.819	1.0723
9	I think extra materials and teaching aids should be added to the courses.	83	1.0	5.0	3.602	.8401
10	Language skills are not taught in the way they should be.	83	1.0	5.0	3.807	1.1525
11	The number of English subjects in the curriculum is not enough to improve my skills.	83	1.0	5.0	3.928	.9077
12	I find literature subjects difficult and I need more support and practice in them.	83	1.0	5.0	3.265	1.1485
			1.0	5.0	3.667	1.003

The responses in Table (3) for the second research question “**What gaps are present between the current EFL curriculum and the learners’ needs?**” reveal notable gaps between the current EFL curriculum and learners’ needs. Most prominently, learners reported that the number of English subjects offered is insufficient to improve their skills ($M = 3.928$, $SD = 0.9077$). Additionally, many felt that the syllabus does not fully reflect the content they actually need to learn ($M = 3.819$, $SD = 1.0723$), and that language skills are not taught using appropriate methods ($M = 3.807$, $SD = 1.1525$). There is also a recognized need for extra teaching materials and aids ($M = 3.602$, $SD = 0.8401$), as well as more time allocated for practicing language skills ($M = 3.578$, $SD = 0.8988$). Finally, learners expressed difficulty with literature subjects and the need for additional support in this area ($M = 3.265$, $SD = 1.1485$). **Table (4) Statistics of the Responses for Research Questions (3)**

			Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation
13	My preferred learning style does not match the teaching methods used in class.	83	2.0	5.0	3.940	.8315
14	The way English is taught now does not suit how I learn best.	83	1.0	5.0	3.386	.9478
15	The teaching methods used in EFL classes make learning English less engaging.	83	1.0	5.0	3.783	.9377
16	The current focus of instruction does not align with the practical language skills I need.	83	1.0	5.0	4.024	1.0704
17	Role-playing and speaking tasks are more helpful for me than traditional grammar exercises.	83	2.0	5.0	3.940	.8315
18	My previous English proficiency was not enough to match the current program.	83	2.0	5.0	3.964	.9032
			1.0	5.0	3.840	0.920

The responses for the third research question “To what extent are the current language teaching methods relevant to the learners’ learning styles?” as presented in table (4) indicate that EFL learners reported a significant mismatch between their preferred learning styles and the current teaching methods, with a high mean score for “My preferred learning style does not match the teaching methods used” ($M = 3.940$, $SD = 0.8315$). Many also felt that the way English is taught does not suit how they learn best ($M = 3.386$, $SD = 0.9478$), and that the methods make learning less engaging ($M = 3.783$, $SD = 0.9377$). The focus of instruction was seen as misaligned with practical language skills needed ($M = 4.024$, $SD = 1.0704$). Learners favored role-playing and speaking tasks over traditional grammar exercises ($M = 3.940$, $SD = 0.8315$). Additionally, many felt their previous proficiency was inadequate for the current program ($M = 3.964$, $SD = 0.9032$). **Table (5) Statistics of the Responses for Research Questions (4)**

		N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
19	Listening activities are more beneficial than other classroom activities.	83	1.0	5.0	3.506	.8464

20	Writing and vocabulary exercises are the most helpful for my learning progress.	83	1.0	5.0	3.494	1.2135
21	I struggle more with speaking and writing than with grammar or reading.	83	1.0	5.0	3.928	.9077
22	Receptive skills like listening and reading require more attention in the classroom.	83	2.0	5.0	3.940	.8315
23	reading require more attention in the classroom.	83	2.0	5.0	4.285	.7730
24	Grammar-focused activities are highly beneficial to my English language learning.	83	1.0	5.0	4.024	1.0704
			1.0	5.0	3.863	0.940

The responses in table (5) for the fourth research question “**Which skill and/or learning activity should receive more focus in the EFL curriculum?**” reveal that EFL learners identified several key skills and activities that require greater emphasis in the EFL curriculum. The highest mean was for reading, which learners believe should receive more classroom attention ($M = 4.285$, $SD = 0.7730$). This was followed by grammar-focused activities being seen as highly beneficial ($M = 4.024$, $SD = 1.0704$), and the need for increased focus on receptive skills such as listening and reading ($M = 3.940$, $SD = 0.8315$). Learners also reported struggling more with speaking and writing than with grammar or reading ($M = 3.928$, $SD = 0.9077$), while listening activities were viewed as beneficial but with a slightly lower mean ($M = 3.506$, $SD = 0.8464$). Writing and vocabulary exercises were also considered helpful for progress ($M = 3.494$, $SD = 1.2135$). **Table (6) Statistics of the Responses for Research Questions (5)**

			Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation
25	Performing dialogues is more useful than grammar activities.	83	2.0	5.0	3.566	.8144
26	I prefer being assessed through assignments, classroom participation, and homework.	83	1.0	5.0	3.627	.8655
27	I prefer being tested through formal midterm and final exams.	83	1.0	5.0	3.988	1.1634
28	Current assessment methods do not fully reflect my language learning progress.	83	2.0	5.0	4.289	.7735
29	My English instructors need specialized training in language assessment techniques.	83	1.0	5.0	3.506	.8464
30	I am learning English primarily for job-related purposes.	83	2.0	5.0	3.964	.9032
			1.0	5.0	3.823	0.894

The responses obtained for the last research question “**Are the current assessment methods valid enough to assess the EFL learners’ needs?**” as statistically presented in Table (6) indicate that learners perceive current assessment methods as insufficient in fully reflecting their language learning progress, as evidenced by the highest mean score for this item ($M = 4.289$, $SD = 0.7735$). Although learners showed a moderate preference for formal midterm and final exams ($M = 3.988$, $SD = 1.1634$), they also value alternative forms of assessment such as assignments, classroom participation, and homework ($M = 3.627$, $SD = 0.8655$). Performing dialogues was considered more useful than grammar activities ($M = 3.566$, $SD = 0.8144$), reflecting learners’ interest in more communicative assessment methods. Furthermore, learners felt that their English instructors require specialized training in language assessment techniques ($M = 3.506$, $SD = 0.8464$). Finally, many learners reported that their motivation for learning English is primarily job-related ($M = 3.964$, $SD = 0.9032$).

11. Findings This section highlights the findings in terms of the means of responses for the items in each research question.

1. What are the EFL learners' needs, wants, and lacks in the EFL classes and are they prioritized in the current curriculum?

- **Item 1:** Learners felt their English level before entering the department was insufficient to meet study demands.
- **Item 2:** Their previous English learning experiences did not align well with the current curriculum.
- **Item 3:** A noticeable gap exists between learners' current proficiency and the target level.
- **Item 4:** Learners reported difficulties and need for more practice in receptive skills (listening and reading).
- **Item 5:** Majority are learning English mainly for educational/non-job-related purposes.
- **Item 6:** Course materials do not fully cover learners' basic needs.

2. What gaps are present between the current EFL curriculum and the learners' needs?

- **Item 7:** the current Curriculum does not provide enough time to practice language skills.
- **Item 8:** Learners' actual needs are not fully reflected in the syllabus.
- **Item 9:** Extra materials and teaching aids are needed.
- **Item 10:** Language skills are not taught appropriately.
- **Item 11:** Number of English subjects is insufficient for skill improvement.
- **Item 12:** Literature subjects are difficult and require more support.

3. To what extent are the current language teaching methods relevant to the learners' learning styles?

- **Item 13:** Preferred learning styles do not match teaching methods used.
- **Item 14:** The current teaching methods do not suit learners' best learning styles.
- **Item 15:** Teaching methods make learning less engaging.
- **Item 16:** Instruction focus does not align with practical skills needed.
- **Item 17:** Role-playing and speaking tasks are more helpful than grammar exercises.
- **Item 18:** Previous English proficiency was insufficient for the current program.

4. Which skill and/or learning activity should receive more focus in the EFL curriculum?

- **Item 19:** Listening activities are more beneficial than other classroom activities.
- **Item 20:** Writing and vocabulary exercises are most helpful for learning progress.
- **Item 21:** Learners struggle more with speaking and writing than grammar or reading.
- **Item 22:** Receptive skills like listening and reading require more classroom attention.
- **Item 23:** Reading needs more attention in the classroom.
- **Item 24:** Grammar-focused activities are highly beneficial.

5. Are the current assessment methods valid enough to assess the EFL learners' needs?

- **Item 25:** Performing dialogues is more useful than grammar activities.
- **Item 26:** Preference for assessment through assignments, participation, and homework.
- **Item 27:** Preference for formal midterm and final exams.
- **Item 28:** Current assessment methods do not fully reflect language learning progress.
- **Item 29:** Instructors need specialized training in language assessment.
- **Item 30:** Learning English mainly for job-related purposes.

12. Conclusions

Based on the statistical analysis, results discussion and findings that highlighted several key insights into EFL learners' experiences and needs, the following conclusions have been drawn:

- Key learner's needs and lacks are not adequately addressed in the current curriculum, which does not sufficiently address learners' actual needs regarding content, teaching methods, practice opportunities, and academic support.
- Learners struggle most with receptive skills—particularly listening and reading—and feel that current materials and teaching methods do not align with their actual needs or learning styles.
- Significant gaps exist in the curriculum, including insufficient content, lack of engaging instructional methods, inadequate teaching aids, and limited time for skill practice.
- Learners express a strong preference for interactive, communicative activities over traditional grammar-based instruction and seek a more balanced focus across all language skills, especially speaking and writing. Thus priority is felt for strengthening reading, grammar, and receptive skills, alongside more support for productive skills like speaking and writing.

- Additionally, the current assessment methods are perceived as lacking validity, with students calling for more diverse and formative evaluations, including performance-based assessments, and thereby the need for more valid, diversified assessment methods and enhanced assessor training to better meet learners' needs.
- These findings collectively underscore the urgent need to revise the EFL curriculum and assessment practices to be more learner-centered, contextually relevant, and skills-balanced.

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Questionnaire

Dear participants, this questionnaire is prepared with the aim to identify and assess the needs, wants and lacks Iraqi EFL learners perceive in the current English language curriculum. The questionnaire consists of 30 questions. Please tick (✓) **ONE of the responses (Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, or Strongly Disagree)** that you find most appropriate. Participants' identities in this study will be kept anonymous. Thank you very much for participating in our research and being a stakeholder in this scientific study.

Part 1: Participants' demographic information

Gender: () Female () Male Age: Year of Study: ()

		Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	The level of English I had before entering the department wasn't enough to deal with the demands of the study.					
2	My previous English learning experiences don't really match the current curriculum					
3	I feel there's a clear gap between my current level and the target level in different language skills.					
4	I face difficulty / I need more practice in receptive skills (Listening and Reading).					
5	I'm learning English mainly for educational or other non-job-related purposes.					
6	The course materials we use don't fully cover the basic needs I have as an English learner.					
7	The curriculum doesn't give enough time to practice language skills.					
8	What I really need to learn is not fully reflected in the syllabus.					
9	I think extra materials and teaching aids should be added to the courses.					

10	Language skills are not taught in the way they should be.					
11	The number of English subjects in the curriculum is not enough to improve my skills.					
12	I find literature subjects difficult and I need more support and practice in them.					
13	My preferred learning style does not match the teaching methods used in class.					
14	The way English is taught now does not suit how I learn best.					
15	The teaching methods used in EFL classes make learning English less engaging.					
16	The current focus of instruction does not align with the practical language skills I need.					
17	Role-playing and speaking tasks are more helpful for me than traditional grammar exercises.					
18	My previous English proficiency was not enough to match the current program.					
19	Listening activities are more beneficial than other classroom activities.					
20	Writing and vocabulary exercises are the most helpful for my learning progress.					
21	I struggle more with speaking and writing than with grammar or reading.					
22	Receptive skills like listening and reading require more attention in the classroom.					
23	reading require more attention in the classroom.					
24	Grammar-focused activities are highly beneficial to my English language learning.					
25	Fluency in speaking English is more important for me than grammar accuracy.					
26	I prefer being assessed through assignments, classroom participation, and homework.					
27	I prefer being tested through formal midterm and final exams.					
28	Current assessment methods do not fully reflect my language learning progress.					
29	My English instructors need specialized training in language assessment techniques.					
30	I am learning English primarily for job-related purposes.					