

Research on Learner Needs Analysis and Listening Activities

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Abstract: Listening is the primary method to access language information. It is an essential part of L2 (second language) teaching but also the most difficult skill to master for L2 learners. Based on this, it is necessary to analyze learners' needs in listening. This article aims to conduct a needs analysis of a selected learner from Iraq and describe course material selection and design. Methods including questionnaires, interviews, and observation were used to collect data. Additionally, targeted 60-minute online listening activities were designed. It was found that listening activities can improve both listening and speaking skills. Thus, language teaching should be student-oriented, and subsequent course materials and activity design should be selected based on the analysis of students' needs.

Keywords: Listening skills; Needs analysis; Second language teaching

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1. Introduction

Listening is the main method to access language information. Listening lesson is an essential part of L2 (second language) teaching. However, for L2 learners, listening is often the most difficult skill to master, and it is the slowest skill to be improved. Before conducting listening classes, teachers need to take into account various factors, such as the classroom environment, learner motivation, background knowledge, etc. The choice of listening materials and the allocation of class time are also the key factors that determine the success of listening lessons. Analyzing learners' needs is the premise of these two steps. Needs analysis refers to the collection and analysis of relevant information of specific individuals or groups, so as to provide a basis for the formulation of corresponding strategies or programs^[1]. In listening teaching, needs analysis could help teachers to better understand the students' L2 level, learning objectives, and other aspects of their needs. Thanks to the module "Teaching Practice," an English language learner was contacted to be the proposed teaching subject of this article—Zainab, who comes from Iraq, was delivered one-on-one lessons online. To master any language, people should practice listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills. According to Rao^[2], in the age of gradual globalization, speaking seems to be widely recognized as the most practical skill. However, babies listen before they speak. It is important for every L2 learner to learn listening. The purpose of this paper is to conduct a needs

analysis of the selected learner and describe course material selection and design for the target student.

2. Literature review

According to Long ^[3], each language lesson needs to have a specific course goal, which is set based on the needs of the learners. In other words, no language teaching could be without a needs analysis. In language teaching, needs are often used to describe what the target learner group could currently do and what the group should be able to do in the target language. The principles of needs analysis have been summarized by many researchers. Firstly, target situation analysis (TSA) is the most common form of needs analysis in the language teaching process ^[4]. To be illustrated, TSA refers to the careful analysis of the scenarios in which students will use the target language in the future, and the ways, media, and other features of the communication in these situations. Such an analysis model could be achieved either by interviewing learners or by asking students to fill in questionnaires. For instance, the teaching target learns English for traveling abroad, so most of the scenarios where students use English are when communicating with foreigners when traveling abroad. Teachers should focus on cultivating students' English communication skills, enhancing their English expression ability, and paying special attention to daily communication. Therefore, students' learning purposes could be discovered in interviews or questionnaires.

Secondly, Rahman pointed out that teachers need to understand students' strengths and weaknesses, as well as their learning experiences ^[5]. This is another variable in the needs analysis, which is called present situation analysis (PSA). To complete this analysis, teachers could also use interviews and questionnaires. In addition, observation and diagnostic tests can be chosen to collect data ^[1]. If a student often makes repeated mistakes in his or her writing, then he or she has a corresponding weakness. Thus, students' weaknesses could be found in the assignments and tests. However, students' self-reflection could also provide teachers with the basis for needs analysis. Students can use learner diaries to record the knowledge they gained in class, the activities they like to participate in, or topics they find difficult to understand ^[1]. The teacher analyzes the students' strengths and weaknesses based on their output. According to West ^[4], deficiency analysis has been developed to access information about learners' current requirements. In other words, it is a principle for teachers to find what learners lack. In addition to the mentioned, there is another key principle—means analysis. In language learning, West stated that it is related to the teaching context and methods, which means teachers should take the environmental situation into consideration ^[4]. If this factor is not taken into account, the failure of some designed activities will affect the efficiency of the classroom and students' experience. For example, the size of the classroom affects the range of activities of students and teachers. Besides, Songhori summarized that teachers try to determine how students would like to learn, which is called strategy analysis ^[6]. Through interviews and observation, teachers could ask students about their preferred learning methods before planning, or observe the activities that stimulate students' interest in class. Adopting appropriate teaching methods is conducive to stimulating students' interest in learning and increasing student engagement in the lesson.

3. Discussion

3.1. Data collection

Based on the above, teachers should analyze the needs of the learner according to the situation of the target student and various conditions to design subsequent activities. Robinson conducted research on when teachers should conduct a needs analysis in 1991 ^[7]. He stressed that students' needs should be analyzed as much as possible before class, and the activity should be continued during the course. Therefore, teachers should turn

needs analysis into a continuous process as much as possible. The methods used to collect data included questionnaires, interviews, and observation. These three methods were chosen for several reasons. First of all, the teacher and the learner had never met before the first class, and the teacher had insufficient basic information about the learner. Thus, the questionnaire is a simple and convenient way to learn some personal information about the student. Secondly, after obtaining the information from the questionnaire filled by the student, the teacher made a second inquiry about the questions that needed to be expanded. Face-to-face interviews could provide more intuitive and rapid access to information. Moreover, during the lesson, the performance of the student also acts as the basis for the subsequent design of lesson activities. As mentioned above, further analysis could be made based on students' feedback on the activities and the completion of the tasks. Songhori provided a basic structure for the questionnaire^[6]. He stressed that teachers should collect students' personal information, including goals, learning methods, learning motivation, and so on. The target learner in this study received a questionnaire with the following questions:

- (1) Where are you from?
- (2) What is your native language?
- (3) Are you working or studying?
- (4) What are your hobbies?
- (5) What is your English level?
- (6) Why do you want to learn English?
- (7) What do you want to learn and improve in English?

3.2. Data analysis

The teacher collected the student's information through the questionnaire. She is from Iraq and her first language is Arabic. She is now unemployed and she learns English so that she can communicate effectively while working in the hospital in the future. Her hobbies include cooking and walking. Her English level is currently at the pre-intermediate level. Since she plans to apply for a Ph.D. in the United Kingdom, she hopes to get an IELTS score of 6.5. Afterward, a 20-minute online interview was conducted. In that interview, the teacher learned that her undergraduate major was biology; her listening and speaking skills are the most important aspects of training. During the interview, it was noticed that Zainab was able to complete a simple daily communication, but she had a slight accent when speaking. The teacher made the first course plan based on the information provided by the student. The teacher decided to use an online video as listening material, which is about some descriptions for patients and doctors. The listening lesson lasted 30 minutes. During the course, the teacher observed the student's condition and learning status. Zainab paid much attention to the pre-teaching words part in the pre-listening stage. Through follow-up exercises, it was found that the student had mastered the words taught by the teacher and was glad to learn new words before listening exercises. During listening exercises, the student could grasp the key information of the listening material. However, the teacher found that listening materials were a little simple and less challenging for her. After the listening stage, the teacher arranged the activity of retelling the listening materials to help the student with the output exercises. The student's accent has an influence on the output effect, but she could actively use the basic expression. After the summary, the teacher found that students needed more pronunciation practice and added more new words.

3.3. Priorities for teaching

In the emphasis on listening and speaking training, this article chose the former. Listening training could help learners to improve their comprehension skills. Richards pointed out that the nature of listening is comprehension^[8]. It is like a baby is listening until he speaks. Trying to speak before gaining listening

comprehension may lead to problematic speaking. Students need to develop different listening skills to improve their listening comprehension. Vandergrift and Goh described that there are six skills to help people understand listening, which include listening for specific information, listening for main idea, listening selectively, listening for global understanding, inference, and prediction^[9]. Before listening, understanding the background knowledge in the context and predicting the listening content enable the listener to capture the listening information more quickly. Moreover, whether the listening material is understood is related to the listener's understanding of the general idea and accessing specific information. This is because listening comprehension is a process of accessing and processing information^[8]. Therefore, guiding students to predict before listening, and listening for gist and details is the focus of listening activities.

3.4. Materials selection

The selection and design of listening materials are the key to the lesson activities, which largely determines whether the class will succeed. In the selection of listening materials, the first aspect is that it should be relevant. Topics and tasks in the listening material should be linked to the learner's goals and interests. According to McGrath^[10], teachers should try to select materials that align with students' interests and needs. If the course materials cannot meet the needs of students and arouse students' interest in learning, it is difficult for students to engage in learning activities, resulting in low efficiency of the course. Thus, in the listening activities, teachers should select relevant materials for students. Secondly, teachers should follow the principle of authenticity. Scholars have different views on the understanding of authenticity. However, most believe that the principle of authenticity covers two aspects. Hedge summarized that language input should serve the authenticity of the user, i.e. the current needs of the learners, and could reflect the use of the language in the real world^[11]. In addition, language input should have the characteristics of natural language between native speakers, such as speed, rhythm, and intonation. If the learning materials conform to the authenticity of real life, it could help students to practice. Moreover, teachers should pay attention to grasp the difficulty of the material. Both the organization of the discourse and the use of the language could affect the difficulty of the input material. Krashen believed that language skills could be acquired only when learners are exposed to understandable language input, which is slightly higher than the existing language skill level^[12]. The aim of activities should focus on the understanding of the meaning or the information rather than the understanding of the form. Learning materials with high difficulty will cause too much pressure on students, which makes them feel bored and weakens their enthusiasm for learning. However, learning materials with low difficulty will reduce the challenge for students to learn. In addition, teachers should follow the thematic principle. Language is the carrier that makes people experience different cultures. Teachers should focus on the central topic and supplement the relevant cultural knowledge when designing the activities. Identifying activity themes can help students develop pre-listening prediction skills. For example, if the listening material is about travel, then the predicted themes may include the travel destination, travel experience, etc. According to Mandiri *et al.*, by predicting the topics, students can understand the listening materials more specifically^[13]. Choosing listening materials according to the theme of the activity could provide students with learning direction, create a context, and immerse students in it.

Based on what was discussed above, targeted 60-minute online listening activities were designed for the confirmed target learner. First of all, according to the student information mentioned above, the student's current English level was A2, so a coursebook suitable for A2 students was selected for her to learn English, which was the *New Language Leader Pre-Intermediate Coursebook*^[14]. The book was developed by the English Language Teaching Center at the University of Sheffield and has some reference features. The topic of the activities is related to health services because the target learner wants to communicate effectively in the hospital in the future. Thus, one part of the coursebook was chosen, which was a scenario about health issues in the university

(**Appendix 1**). Secondly, it has been planned that, by the end of the activities, the learner will have developed listening for specific details and spoken accuracy in the context of health service. To be illustrated, the author would like to provide health and well-being problems for the learner to discuss, make predictions, develop expressions for giving advice and reasons, and practice phrase stress and rhythm. According to the learning needs of the student, working in the hospital requires the use of the expression of suggestions and reasons. In previous lessons, the teacher noticed that the student had an accent when speaking English, so pronunciation training activities were also arranged. The activities of prediction and listening to details could not only provide students with the IELTS test method but also provide the basis for student's daily listening methods.

3.5. Course design

The listening materials were two interviews by a university health service staff with two university students. There were three questions used to introduce the topic of activities and activate students' schema: According to two health issues (headaches and stress caused by exams or workload), have you (or has someone you know) ever experienced any of these health and well-being problems? Do you know why you (he/she) had those problems? How did you (he/she) solve them?

In the pre-listening stage, the teacher would like to teach a few words to help students reduce the difficulty of listening. These words were, respectively: routine, homesick, variety, and embarrassing. In order to enable the learner to recognize these new words in the listening material, the teacher clarified the meaning, form, and pronunciation (MFP), and practiced pronunciation. After that, there was an opportunity for Zainab to make predictions and catch specific information. Since the listening materials were two interviews, the listening exercises required filling in the blanks and there were some key words around the blanks. For example, the space was preceded by the "Year," so the students needed to fill the space with their grade: First, Second, Third, Final, etc. Before the listening activity, the student would be led to find out the keywords and predict the content of the gaps. The listening recording was then played, and the student was asked to fill in the gaps and check for consistency with the predictions. The exercise could be found in situation 2a in **Appendix 1**, which could be linked to section 1 in the IELTS listening test. In order to test whether the student could complete it independently, the follow-up content of the two listening exercises required students to identify keywords and predict them by themselves. The exercise could be found in situation 2c in **Appendix 1**. The above two listening activities were designed to help student train their skills in listening for specific information. After the listening exercise, in order to introduce the expression of giving suggestions and reasons, the student would complete exercise 3a, so as to identify the phrases used to provide suggestions and explain the reasons. Besides, the logical connections could be introduced to the student through exercise 4a, which were "because" and "in order to." To further illustrate their usage, some sentences would be provided for the student. In the post-listening stage, before training pronunciation, the teacher would first introduce the rules of phrase rereading and rhythm, which were, the stress rules of content words and structure words. The subsequent pronunciation exercises were used to test whether the student had mastered the stress rules in the phrase. Finally, a role-playing activity was organized for the student to be a health officer to do a new interview. This session was for students to use the interview to access the patient's personal information and provide advice and further explanation.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, language teaching should be student-oriented, and subsequent course materials and activity design should be selected based on the analysis of students' needs. Before teaching, teachers should obtain students' information, such as their interests, advantages, and disadvantages. Teachers need to focus on

understanding the students' actual situation, such as learning motivation, desire, language level, learning methods, preferences, etc. Needs analysis is an ongoing process, so student performance in the classroom as well as diagnostic tests could also help teachers to gain a further understanding of the students' level and needs. In the design of future listening teaching activities, teachers should help students establish a good learning attitude, and improve students' preferences and their interest in learning. Besides, listening is based on a certain number of words. In the pre-listening stage, helping students to familiarize new words is an effective way to help them reduce the difficulty of listening and expand their language knowledge. In addition, the expansion of background knowledge should not be ignored. Teachers should consider the situation in which students use the target language, so as to choose a more suitable context for students to practice. In the process of communication, listening and speaking are closely related to each other. Therefore, the listening activities can not only let the students practice listening but also encourage them to speak and mobilize their enthusiasm.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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Appendix

4.3 SCENARIO HEALTH ISSUES

PREPARATION

1 Have you (or has someone you know) ever experienced any of these health and well-being problems? Do you know why you (he/she) had those problems? How did you (he/she) solve them?

- had headaches
- felt run-down – lacking energy and feeling tired
- felt homesick
- been unable to concentrate on studies or work
- felt stressed by exams or workload

SITUATION

2a 4.3 Universities often have Student Health and Well-Being Services which provide help and advice to students who have a range of worries, problems and minor health concerns. Mavis Much is a Health Officer at a university. Listen to two students talking to her, and complete Mavis's notes.

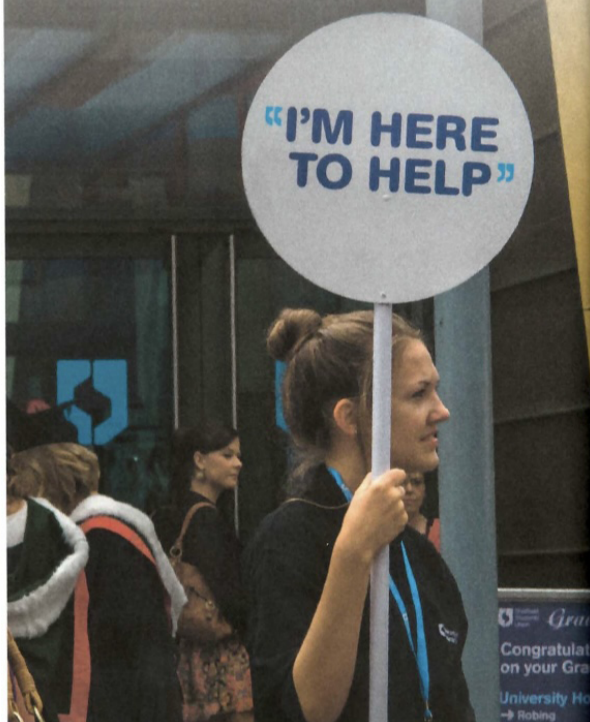
Name:	Abigail _____
Year:	Final
Subject:	_____
Problem:	Nervous about exams + not _____ well.
Background:	Studies all _____, _____. Goes to bed at _____, gets up at _____. Has _____ meals a day. Drinks a lot of _____. Does _____ exercise.
Name:	Dane _____
Year:	_____
Subject:	_____
Problem:	Feels _____.
Background:	Not made many _____. Misses his mother and her _____. Only happy when goes to _____, goes there nearly _____. Losing _____ in his studies. Wants _____.



2b What advice can you give the students in Exercise 2a?

2c 4.4 Listen to the advice which Mavis gives to the students, and complete her notes below. Was any of her advice the same as yours?

ADVICE	REASON
Abigail	
Take more _____.	_____ a little.
Drink less _____.	
No coffee in the _____.	Coffee keeps you _____.
Don't take _____ pills.	
Dane	
Join a _____ club.	Make _____.
	Stop _____ home.
_____ basketball.	American and _____
Change eating _____.	
Don't go to McDonald's _____.	Need _____.
_____.	
Join a cookery _____.	_____ to cook.



KEY LANGUAGE

GIVING ADVICE AND REASONS

3a 4.5 Complete these sentences. Then listen and check.

- I think you _____ take more breaks during the day in _____ to relax a little.
- You _____ drink a lot of coffee _____ it stops you from relaxing.
- _____ drinking just two or three cups a day.
- _____ you play sport, your mind will stop thinking about home.
- And you _____ to change your eating habits.

3b Answer these questions about the language above.

- Which phrases do you use to give a piece of advice?
- Which phrases do you use to give the reasons for / explain your advice?

3c Find more examples of these phrases in Audio script 4.4 on page 152.

4a Match these pieces of advice (1–6) with the reasons below (a–f). Then choose the correct linking word or phrase.

- You ought to eat some fruit every day *because* / *in order to*
 - You should go to the optician's *because* / *to*
 - You shouldn't play computer games all night *to* / *because*
 - Try changing your chair *in order to* / *because*
 - You should do some yoga *to* / *because*
 - Try eating a good breakfast *in order to* / *because*
- that gives you a lot of energy for the day.
 - check your eyesight.
 - it has a lot of vitamins.
 - reduce your stress levels.
 - that makes you tired in class.
 - make your back better.

4b Make logical connections. Which problems in Exercise 1 could the solutions above solve?

PRONUNCIATION

5a **Phrase stress and rhythm** Look at these phrases from Exercise 3a. Which words do you think are key words?

- during the day
- drink a lot of coffee

5b 4.6 Key words are usually stressed. Listen and check your ideas above.

5c 4.7 Which are the key words in these phrases? Listen and check. Practise saying the phrases.

- You should take more breaks.
- If you play sport, ...
- Change your eating habits.
- It has a lot of vitamins.
- Reduce your stress levels.

TASK

GIVING ADVICE ABOUT HEALTH ISSUES

6a Work with a partner.

Student A: You are a health officer at a university. Prepare to interview and advise a student. Use the Key language and the Useful phrases on this page to help.

USEFUL PHRASES

What are you studying?
How can I help?
How long have you had this problem?

Student B: You are a university student. You are going to discuss your health problems with a health officer. Turn to page 148 and prepare to tell the health officer about your problems.

6b Perform the role-play.

7 Change roles and repeat the role-play.

Student A: Turn to page 140.

Student B: Prepare to be the health officer.



Appendix 1. The selected part of the coursebook: A scenario about health issues