3 Needs analysis

One of the basic assumptions of curriculum development is that a sound educational program should be based on an analysis of learners’ needs. Procedures used to collect information about learners’ needs are known as needs analysis. Needs analysis as a distinct and necessary phase in planning educational programs emerged in the 1960s as part of the systems approach to curriculum development and was part of the prevalent philosophy of educational accountability (Stufflebeam, McCormick, Brinkerhoff, and Nelson 1985). If providers of training programs wanted public or other sources of funding in order to provide different kinds of training programs, they were required to demonstrate that a proposed program was a response to a genuine need (Pratt 1980). Subsequently needs analysis developed into something of an industry. Berwick (1989, 51) comments:

The need for convincing precision in educational needs assessment was also reinforced during this period by the “behavioral objectives” movement in educational planning, particularly in North America, which insisted on specifying in measurable form all goals of importance within an educational system. The emphasis on precision and accountability clearly influenced the appearance of needs assessment as a form of educational technology and its diversification into a collection of educational research methodologies.

Needs analysis was introduced into language teaching through the ESP movement (see Chapter 2). From the 1960s, the demand for specialized language programs grew and applied linguists increasingly began to employ needs analysis procedures in language teaching. By the 1980s, in many parts of the world a “needs-based philosophy” emerged in language teaching, particularly in relation to ESP and vocationally oriented program design (Brindley 1984). In this chapter we will examine approaches to needs analysis and consider the purposes of needs analysis, the nature of needs, who needs analysis is intended for, who the target population is, who collects information, what procedures can be used, and how the information collected can be used. (Examples of two different needs analyses are given on pages 68–71.)
The purposes of needs analysis

Needs analysis in language teaching may be used for a number of different purposes, for example:

- to find out what language skills a learner needs in order to perform a particular role, such as sales manager, tour guide, or university student
- to help determine if an existing course adequately addresses the needs of potential students
- to determine which students from a group are most in need of training in particular language skills
- to identify a change of direction that people in a reference group feel is important
- to identify a gap between what students are able to do and what they need to be able to do
- to collect information about a particular problem learners are experiencing

In the case of K-12 ESL programs (e.g., for ESL students in public schools) Linse (1993) identifies the following purposes for needs analysis:

- to compile a demographic profile of all the languages and language groups represented by the students
- to assess their level of language acquisition in their native language and in English
- to determine their communicative abilities in English
- to determine their formal knowledge of English
- to find out how students use language on a daily basis
- to determine what English language skills are necessary to enable students to participate in all school and community activities in English
- to find out what prior experiences students have had with formal education
- to determine the attitudes of the students and their families toward formal schooling and education
- to find out what preliteracy and literacy skills the students possess
- to ascertain the students’ level of cognitive development and acquisition of academic skills in their native language(s)
- to ascertain what cognitive and academic skills students have acquired in English
- to determine the cultural, political, and personal characteristics of students

The first step in conducting a needs analysis is therefore to decide exactly what its purpose or purposes are. For example, when a needs analysis of restaurant employees is conducted, the purposes might be:
- to determine current levels of language proficiency of employees
- to determine how many employees are in need of the language training
- to identify senior restaurant staff’s perception of language problems employees have on the job
- to identify employees’ perceptions of language difficulties they face on the job
- to ascertain the types of transactions employees typically perform in English
- to determine the language characteristics of those transactions
- to assess the extent to which employees’ needs are met by currently available programs and textbooks

In many cases, learners’ language needs may be relatively easy to determine, particularly if learners need to learn a language for very specific purposes, for example, employment in fields such as tourism, nursing, or the hotel industry. In this case the tasks employees typically carry out in English can be observed and the language needs of those tasks determined. The information obtained can then serve as a basis for planning a training program. In some cases, "needs" also includes students’ rights. Linse comments:

It is the school’s responsibility to take into account the cultural, political, and personal characteristics of students as the curriculum is developed in order to plan activities and objectives that are realistic and purposeful. It is not the responsibility of the school to act on political matters, but it is the school’s responsibility to provide equal access to school opportunities and to validate the experiences of all students, regardless of their political and/or cultural backgrounds. (Linse, in Hudelson 1993, 46)

In other cases, learners’ needs may not be so immediate — for example, students learning English as a secondary school subject in an EFL context. Here English may be a compulsory subject that is considered an important part of a child’s general education. However, even though the students may not have any immediate perceptions of needs, curriculum planners will generally have consulted employers, parents, teachers, and others to find out what knowledge of English they expect high school graduates to achieve. In many countries, the introduction of English or another foreign language in elementary or secondary school is based on what curriculum planners consider best for students to study at school in the same way that math, history, and physical education are included in the school curriculum. Learners are not consulted as to whether they perceive a need for such knowledge.

Their needs have been decided for them by those concerned with their long-term welfare. Needs analysis thus includes the study of perceived and present needs as well as potential and unrecognized needs.
Needs analysis may take place prior to, during, or after a language program. Much of the literature on needs analysis is based on the assumption that it is part of the planning that takes place as part of the development of a course. It assumes that time and resources are available to plan, collect, and analyze relevant information for a planned program of instruction. This “a priori” approach to needs analysis requires long-term planning and assumes adequate time and resources to devote to needs analysis. Example 1 (pages 68–70) is a needs analysis of this type.

In some cases, however, long-term planning is not an option. Little may be known in detail about a group of learners apart from the fact that a group of forty-five Mexican civil servants will be arriving in 3 weeks’ time and want to work on their language skills. In these circumstances, needs analysis has to be carried out as part of the delivery of the course. Goals, content, and the teaching approach are shaped by information collected during the teaching of the course. Example 2 (pages 70–71) is a needs analysis of this kind.

At other times, the bulk of the information that constitutes the needs analysis may be collected after the course is finished. The information collected is then analyzed in order to obtain a more comprehensive view of the learners’ needs as a basis for evaluating and revising the program (see Chapter 9).

What are needs?

The term needs is not as straightforward as it might appear, and hence the term is sometimes used to refer to wants, desires, demands, expectation, motivations, lacks, constraints, and requirements (Brindley 1984, 28). Needs are often described in terms of a linguistic deficiency, that is, as describing the difference between what a learner can presently do in a language and what he or she should be able to do. This suggests that needs have objective reality and are simply there waiting to be identified and analyzed. Porcher (1977, in Brindley 1984, 29) offers a different perspective: “Need is not a thing that exists and might be encountered ready-made on the street. It is a thing that is constructed, the center of conceptual networks and the product of a number of epistemological choices (which are not innocent themselves, of course).” What is identified as a need is dependent on judgment and reflects the interests and values of those making such a judgment. Teachers, learners, employers, parents, and other stakeholders (discussed in the next section) may thus all have different views as to what needs are. For example, in considering the needs of immigrants, representatives of the majority population may see the immigrants’ needs as achieving cultural and
linguistic assimilation as quickly as possible and hence may want a needs analysis to identify the language skills immigrants require in order to survive, and ultimately, assimilate into the dominant culture. The immigrants themselves, however, may see their goals as concerned with communication for survival and independence, particularly economic survival, but may have no wish to assimilate into the dominant culture (Burnett 1998). Auerbach (1995, 9) has pointed out that English language teaching has often been viewed as a "neutral transfer of skills, knowledge, or competencies" and that such an approach is based on the needs of social institutions, rather than language learners, and ignores questions of power:

Pedagogical choices about curriculum development, content, materials, classroom processes, and language use, although appearing to be informed by apolitical professional considerations, are in fact inherently ideological in nature, with significant implications for learners' socioeconomic roles. (Auerbach 1995, 9)

Needs are often described in terms of language needs, that is, as the language skills needed to survive in an English-dominant society. But as Auerbach (1995) and others have pointed out, in many cases, particularly that of immigrant minorities in English-dominant societies, such persons also have other kinds of needs. These relate to housing, health care, access to schooling for their children, access to community agencies and services, and ways of addressing exploitation and discrimination in the workplace. How can the curriculum give learners the linguistic and other resources they need to understand and access resources they have the right to make use of in the community and to articulate and defend their own rights and interests? Planning an ESL curriculum in this case not only involves identifying students' language needs, but seeks "to enable them to critically examine [the existing order] and become active in shaping their own roles in it." (Auerbach 1995, 15). This issue will be examined in more detail when we consider alternative curriculum models and their value, in Chapter 5.

The users of needs analysis

A needs analysis may be conducted for a variety of different users. For example, in conducting a needs analysis to help revise the secondary school English curriculum in a country, the end users include:

- curriculum officers in the ministry of education, who may wish to use the information to evaluate the adequacy of existing syllabus, curriculum, and materials
• teachers who will teach from the new curriculum
• learners, who will be taught from the curriculum
• writers, who are preparing new textbooks
• testing personnel, who are involved in developing end-of-school assessments
• staff of tertiary institutions, who are interested in knowing what the expected level will be of students exiting the schools and what problems they face

In the case of a needs analysis conducted by a private institute of language needs of trainee accountants in international accounting firms, the target users might be:

• trainers responsible for designing training programs and materials
• a funding body, such as the local professional society for accountants who are interested in seeing a concrete product as an outcome of their funding
• employers who are interested in improving the job performance of new staff

With small-scale needs analysis such as that carried out by a single teacher on his or her class, the audience might consist of the teacher, other teachers, and the program coordinator. In cases of large-scale needs analysis, there will be multiple audiences for the results of a needs analysis. Determining the likely audiences is an important first step in planning a needs analysis in order to ensure that the information they need is obtained and that the needs analysis will have the impact it is designed to have. Stufflebeam et al. (1985, 25) comment: "It is important to remember that not all key audiences are likely to be identified at the start of a study. Also, it is entirely possible that the relative importance of various audiences will change during the study."

Needs analysis can thus have a political dimension. It can be used to support a particular agenda, for example, by giving priority to one group to the exclusion of others within a population or in order to justify a decision that has already been made on economic or other grounds. For example, an employer might want to use information from a needs analysis to justify replacing certain staff rather than investing in providing for retraining. In any situation where needs analysis is being undertaken, there are thus different stakeholders, that is, those who have a particular interest or involvement in the issues or programs that are being examined, and it is important to try to get a sense of what their different agendas are. Connelly and Clandinin (1988, 124) define a stakeholder as "a person or group of persons with a right to comment on, and have input into, the curriculum process offered
in schools.” Different stakeholders will want different things from the curriculum. Connelly and Clandinin (1988, 131–132) suggest that when a group of persons are working on a curriculum committee or trying to solve a curriculum problem they should think of the planning process as a curriculum stakeholder situation and ask the following questions:

1. What is the purpose of the curriculum situation?
2. If there is a group, what is the makeup of the group?
3. Who set up the project?
4. How were the group’s membership and purpose established?

From the answers to these questions, further questions follow:

1. How accountable am I to this stakeholder?
2. How much will this stakeholder be affected by my decision?
3. How much risk is there in ignoring this stakeholder?
4. How much right has this stakeholder to direct my action?

The target population

The target population in a needs analysis refers to the people about whom information will be collected. Typically, in language programs these will be language learners or potential language learners, but others are also often involved depending on whether they can provide information useful in meeting the purposes of the needs analysis. For example, in conducting a needs analysis to determine the focus of an English program in public secondary schools in an EFL context, the target population might include:

- policy makers
- ministry of education officials
- teachers
- students
- academics
- employers
- vocational training specialists
- parents
- influential individuals and pressure groups
- academic specialists
- community agencies

Within each target group, subcategories of respondents might be needed to provide different perspectives on needs. For example, in conducting a needs
analysis of students studying foreign languages at a New Zealand university (Richards and Gravatt 1998), the following categories of students were included to help determine students' motivations for selecting a language course, dropping a language course, or choosing not to take a language course:

- students currently enrolled in a foreign language course
- students previously enrolled but no longer studying a language
- students who have never studied a foreign language

In determining the target population, an important issue is that of sampling. In some cases, the population is small enough for every learner to be included in the sample. In other cases, this approach is not feasible and so decisions must be made about the size of the sample to be included in a needs analysis. Sampling involves asking a portion of the potential population instead of the total population and seeks to create a sample that is representative of the total population. Elley (1984) points out that a number of factors influence the approach to sampling, such as the homogeneity of the population in terms of the kinds of skills, attitudes, or knowledge being sought or the need to study subgroups within the sample – for example, based on sex, language group, or other factors. Where the target population is large, specialized advice is often needed to determine what approach to sampling best suits the purpose of the study and the sources of information available.

Administering the needs analysis

Planning a needs analysis involves deciding who will administer the needs analysis and collect and analyze the results. Needs analyses vary in their scope and demands, from a survey of a whole school population in a country to a study of a group of thirty learners in a single institution. Sometimes a team of personnel is assembled specifically for the purpose of doing the analysis; at other times two or three interested teachers may be the only ones involved. For example, in a needs analysis of the language needs of non-English-background students studying at a New Zealand university (see Appendix 3), the following were involved:

- the research team made up of two academics and a research assistant
- colleagues in different departments who discussed the project and reviewed sample questionnaires
- students who piloted the questionnaire
Needs analysis

- academic staff of the university who administered some of the questionnaires
- secretarial support involved in preparing questionnaires and tabulating data

In some language programs, informal needs analysis is part of a teacher's ongoing responsibilities. Shaw and Dowsett (1986) describe this approach in the Australian Adult Migrant Education Program:

Informal needs assessment deals with the informal negotiations that take place between class teachers and students in the form of chats with either individual students, groups of students, or the whole class in order to select a focus for the class and create group cohesion by establishing a coincidence of learning needs. 

... Informal needs assessment is normally the main task of the classroom teacher during week one of the course. ... (It) is a necessary component of information retrieval on students' learning needs and should be recorded. It can subsequently be used as an input for aims and objectives setting and for devising course outlines. (Shaw and Dowsett 1986, 47-49)

Information collected in this way may complement information collected through more formal means.

Procedures for conducting needs analysis

A variety of procedures can be used in conducting needs analysis and the kind of information obtained is often dependent on the type of procedure selected. Since any one source of information is likely to be incomplete or partial, a triangulair approach (i.e., collecting information from two or more sources) is advisable. Many different sources of information should be sought. For example, when a needs analysis of the writing problems encountered by foreign students enrolled in American universities is conducted, information could be obtained from the following sources:

- samples of student writing
- test data on student performance
- reports by teachers on typical problems students face
- opinions of experts
- information from students via interviews and questionnaires
- analysis of textbooks teaching academic writing
- survey or related literature
- examples of writing programs from other institutions
- examples of writing assignments given to first-year university students
Procedures for collecting information during a needs analysis can be selected from among the following:

**Questionnaires**

Questionnaires are one of the most common instruments used. They are relatively easy to prepare, they can be used with large numbers of subjects, and they obtain information that is relatively easy to tabulate and analyze. They can also be used to elicit information about many different kinds of issues, such as language use, communication difficulties, preferred learning styles, preferred classroom activities, and attitudes and beliefs.

Questionnaires are either based on a set of structured items (in which the respondent chooses from a limited number of responses) or unstructured (in which open-ended questions are given that the respondent can answer as he or she chooses). Structured items are much easier to analyze and are hence normally preferred. Appendix 2 illustrates a questionnaire designed as a basis for planning courses in Cantonese for non-Chinese residents of Hong Kong. It seeks information on the following:

- situations in which Cantonese could be used
- self-assessment of current proficiency level in Cantonese
- previous experience of Cantonese courses
- views on textbooks for learning Cantonese
- views on approaches to teaching Cantonese
- learning-style preferences
- views on Cantonese as a language

(A disadvantage of questionnaires, however, is that the information obtained may be fairly superficial or imprecise and will often need follow-up to gain a fuller understanding of what respondents intend. It should also be recognized that there are many badly designed questionnaires in educational research, and it is advisable to become familiar with the principles of good questionnaire design to ensure that the information obtained is reliable. Filling of questionnaires is essential to identify ambiguities and other problems before the questionnaire is administered. Some issues involved in the design of questionnaires are given in Appendix 1.

**Self-ratings**

These consist of scales that students or others use to rate their knowledge or abilities. (Self-ratings might also be included as part of a questionnaire.) For example, a student might rate how well he or she can handle a job in-
terview in English. The disadvantage of such an instrument is that it provides only impressionistic information and information that is not very precise.

**Interviews**

Interviews allow for a more in-depth exploration of issues than is possible with a questionnaire, though they take longer to administer and are only feasible for smaller groups. An interview may often be useful at the preliminary stage of designing a questionnaire, since it will help the designer get a sense of what topics and issues can be focused on in the questionnaire. A structured interview in which a set series of questions is used allows more consistency across responses to be obtained. Interviews can be conducted face-to-face or over the telephone.

**Meetings**

A meeting allows a large amount of information to be collected in a fairly short time. For example, a meeting of teachers on the topic “students’ problems with listening comprehension” might generate a wide range of ideas. However, information obtained in this way may be impressionistic and subjective and reflect the ideas of more outspoken members of a group.

**Observation**

Observations of learners’ behavior in a target situation is another way of assessing their needs. For example, observing clerks performing their jobs in a bank will enable the observer to arrive at certain conclusions about their language needs.

However, people often do not perform well when they are being observed, so this has to be taken into account. In addition, observation is a specialized skill. Knowing how to observe, what to look for, and how to make use of the information obtained generally requires specialized training.

**Collecting learner language samples**

Collecting data on how well learners perform on different language tasks (e.g., business letters, interviews, telephone calls) and documenting the typical problems they have is a useful and direct source of information about learners’ language needs. Language samples may be collected through the following means:
Chapter 2

- **written or oral tasks**: Examples of students written or oral work are collected.
- **simulations or role plays**: Students are given simulations to carry out and their performance is observed or recorded.
- **achievement tests**: Students are tested for their abilities in different domains of language use.
- **performance tests**: Students are tested on job-related or task-related behaviors, such as "how well a job interview can be carried out in English."

**Task analysis**

This refers to analysis of the kinds of tasks the learners will have to carry out in English in a future occupational or educational setting and assessment of the linguistic characteristics and demands of the tasks. For example, a hotel employee might have to perform the following tasks in English:

- greet hotel guests
- inquire about their accommodation needs
- inform them of accommodation available at the hotel
- help them make a suitable choice of accommodation
- handle check-in procedures

Berwick (1989, 57) observes: "The emphasis of target situation analysis is on the nature and effect of target language communications in particular situations (in offices, on assembly lines, in meeting rooms, in content-area classrooms, for example). Expert analysis of communication establishes standards against which current performance can be gauged." Once target tasks have been identified, their linguistic characteristics are determined as a basis for designing a language course or training materials.

**Case studies**

With a case study, a single student or a selected group of students is followed through a relevant work or educational experience in order to determine the characteristics of that situation. For example, a newly arrived immigrant might be studied for three months, during which time the student keeps a log of his or her daily language experiences in English, the situations in which the language is used, and the problems he or she encounters. Although it is generally not possible to generalize from a case study, it provides a very rich source of information that may complement information obtained from other sources.
Analysis of available information

In any situation where a needs analysis is needed, a large amount of relevant information is generally available in various sources. These include:

- books
- journal articles
- reports and surveys
- records and files

An analysis of available information is normally the first step in a needs analysis because there are very few problems in language teaching that have not been written about or analyzed somewhere.

Designing the needs analysis

Designing a needs analysis involves choosing from among the various options discussed above and selecting those that are likely to give a comprehensive view of learners' needs and that represent the interests of the different stakeholders involved. Decisions have to be made on the practical procedures involved in collecting, organizing, analyzing, and reporting the information collected. It is important to make sure that the needs analysis does not produce an information overload. There needs to be a clear reason for collecting different kinds of information so as to ensure that only information that will actually be used is collected. In investigating the language needs of non-English-background students at a New Zealand university (Gravatt, Richards, and Lewis 1997), the following procedures were used:

1. literature survey
2. analysis of a wide range of survey questionnaires
3. contact with others who had conducted similar surveys
4. interviews with teachers to determine goals
5. identification of participating departments
6. presentation of project proposal to participating departments and identification of liaison person in each department
7. development of a pilot student and staff questionnaire
8. review of the questionnaires by colleagues
9. piloting of the questionnaires
10. selection of staff and student subjects
11. developing a schedule for collecting data
12. administration of questionnaires
13. follow-up interviews with selected participants
14. tabulation of responses
15. analysis of responses
16. writing up of report and recommendations

In smaller-scale needs analysis such as that of a teacher or group of teachers assessing the needs of new groups of students in a language program, needs analysis procedures may consist of:

- initial questionnaire
- follow-up individual and group interviews
- meetings with students
- meetings with other teachers
- ongoing classroom observation
- tests

Making use of the information obtained

The results of a needs analysis will generally consist of information taken from several different sources and summarized in the form of ranked lists of different kinds. For example, it might result in lists of the following kind:

- situations in which English is frequently used
- situations in which difficulties are encountered
- comments most often made by people on learners’ performance
- frequencies with which different transactions are carried out
- perceived difficulties with different aspects of language use
- preferences for different kinds of activities in teaching
- frequencies of errors made in different types of situations or activities
- common communication problems in different situations
- suggestions and opinions about different aspects of learners’ problems
- frequencies of linguistic items or units in different texts or situations

One of the findings of a needs analysis of problems of ESL students attending university lectures was a list of the frequency with which students experienced difficulties with speaking and listening skills (Gravett et al. 1997, 36). The most common difficulties reported were (by rank):

1. large-group discussions
2. class discussions
3. interactions with native speakers
4. out-of-class projects
5. small-group work
6. demonstrator interactions
7. class participation

However, such a listing provides little useful information about the precise type of problems the learners experience in relation to each event. Even if more detailed information had been provided, the results would still be impressionistic. For example, in relation to event 1 (large-group discussions), more detailed information could have been sought, from which a further listing might have resulted – the most difficult aspects of taking part in group discussions. Johns and Johns (1977) provide such a list based on a needs analysis of problems students have with discussions. The most frequent difficulties were:

1. comprehension of spoken English ("they speak too fast"); "they mumble"; "vocabulary is idiomatic")
2. the pressing need to formulate a contribution quickly ("I can’t think what to say")
3. shyness about the value of a contribution ("I might say something wrong")
4. inability to formulate an idea in English ("I don’t know how to say it in English")
5. awareness that a given function may be realized in different ways ("I don’t know the best way to say it")
6. frustration about being unable to enter the discussion ("some students speak too much") (Johns and Johns 1977)

Yet even with this more detailed breakdown no direct application to program design is possible. In order to develop aims and objectives that addressed each problem, more analysis and research would be needed to further understand what is implied by "comprehension of spoken English" and before the information obtained could be used in course planning. The point here is that there is no direct application of the information obtained from needs analysis. Although the information gathered is useful, it still has to be subjected to a great deal of interpretation before it can be usefully applied in program planning.

In the course of carrying out a needs analysis, a large number of potential needs may be identified. However, these needs will have to be prioritized because not all of them may be practical to address in a language program, or perhaps the time frame available in the program is suitable for addressing only a portion of them. And the mere fact that needs have been
identified does not automatically imply that changes will have to be made in the curriculum. First, the existing curriculum (when there is one) has to be examined to see to what extent the needs that have been identified are being met. Decisions will therefore have to be made concerning which of the needs are critical, which are important, and which are merely desirable. In addition, some needs will be immediate and others longer-term. For some, solutions will be feasible; for others, they may be impractical.

It is also important to remember that because needs are not objective facts but subjective interpretations of information from a large variety of sources, a great deal of consultation is needed with the various stakeholders to ensure that the conclusions drawn from a needs analysis are appropriate and relevant. It often happens that some of the information may be contradictory. Stufflebeam et al. (1985, 111) remind us:

The process of analysis [of the results of a needs analysis] involves efforts that are thoughtful, investigatory, systematic, and carefully recorded so that they can be replicated and reviewed. The primary goal of analysis is to bring meaning to the obtained information and to do so in the context of some philosophy, relevant perspectives, and value positions that may be in conflict.

Thus, for example, in a needs analysis as part of curriculum renewal in a state education system, different views of problems in the curriculum emerged. A number of different points of view emerged as to what should be changed:

- **learners' view**: more support for learning needed and reduction of the amount of materials they had to study
- **academics' view**: better preparation for tertiary studies needed in terms of reading and writing skills
- **employers' view**: better preparation for employment required in terms of basic communication skills
- **teachers' view**: better grasp of grammar needed by learners

Brindley (1989) discusses differences between learners' and teachers' views of needs and suggests the need for a negotiation process in order to satisfy and clarify each other's assumptions. The same is true of other stakeholders in the curriculum.

Where there are several different audiences for the needs analysis (e.g., teachers, administrators, a funding body), the information obtained will have to be analyzed—and analyzed in a form that suits each group's interests. One group may require a brief overview of the findings while another may be interested in detailed findings. The format for reporting the findings may also vary. For example, it might include:
Needs analysis thus produces information that can be used in different ways. For example:

- It may provide the basis for the evaluation of an existing program or a component of a program.
- It may provide the basis for planning goals and objectives for a future program.
- It may assist with developing tests and other assessment procedures.
- It can help with the selection of appropriate teaching methods in a program.
- It may provide the basis for developing a syllabus and teaching materials for a course.
- It may provide information that can be used as part of a course or program report to an external body or organization.

In none of these cases, however, is there a direct route from needs analysis to application. Some of these applications will be discussed in the chapters that follow. Although a major application of needs analysis is in the design of language programs, before a program can be designed additional information is needed on factors that can have an impact on the program. The identification of these factors and the assessment of their likely impact form the focus of Chapter 4.

Discussion questions and activities

1. Needs analysis is very applicable in situations where students have very specific language needs. However, it can also be used in situations where learners' needs are not so specific, as in the case of students learning English as a foreign language in a school setting. What might the focus of a needs analysis be in this situation?

2. If you were planning a needs analysis for the situation in which you teach, what information would you seek to obtain?

3. Discuss the concept of "stakeholders" in planning a needs analysis in relation to a context you are familiar with. How can the concerns of different stakeholders be addressed?