The English language teaching enterprise in the Postcolonial Cameroon: A focus on the framework of needs analysis

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It is an established fact that when most students in some non-native settings like Cameroon, leave secondary/high schools, their performance in written and/or oral communication is still relatively mediocre. This state of affairs has been an issue of several inquiries over the years. Most researchers attributed learner’s poor performance to psychological, social and linguistic factors. This paper rests on the solid assumption that most learners find difficulties in expressing themselves in English at the completion of secondary school in Cameroon because the school curriculum is not designed within the framework of Needs Analysis. A number of issues will be addressed in this research endeavour. In it, we shall give an insight into the notion of Needs Analysis, establish its theoretical basis, explore some models and approaches of this theoretical framework within the ESL/EFL context and finally show its potential usefulness.

Keyword: English Language Teaching, Needs Analysis, ESL, EFL.

INTRODUCTION

This research paper suggests, in the light of some investigations that have carried out, some curricular and pedagogical innovations. In fact, such inquiries reveal that even after several years of English studies, most students cannot use English in real life situations though the syllabuses specify that at the end of secondary school, students would have to use the English language to cope with the many varying situations and contexts in which they find themselves at all times. Using the metaphor of the ‘wall’, Nkwetisama (2012) points out that “walls seem to exist between the knowledge these learners get in the classrooms and the implementation of the knowledge in the real world society for which that knowledge is destined”. We believe that, if curriculum designers and stakeholders give a consideration to this new theoretical framework, things will improve considerably: the goals which for the moment are unrealistic will be realistic enough, the traditional approaches will give place to modern approaches to language teaching and the way of evaluating students will be improved upon.

Cameroon from the general perspective

Geographically, Cameroon, ‘Africa in miniature’ par excellence, is a central African country which shares boundaries with more than three countries of the central African sub-region. Thus, the country is bounded to the west by Nigeria, an English speaking country. It shares a border with one Spanish speaking country (Equatorial Guinea). The country is surrounded to the North, South and East by four French speaking countries: to the East, it is bounded by Central African Republic, to the North by Chad and to the South by Gabon and Congo. Demographically, the population of Cameroon is
estimated at around 16 million people (Ethnologue: 2003) organised in different ethnic groups. Historically, Cameroon was colonised by three main European countries the first being Germany. The country was under British administration for close to four decades (1884-1918). Unfortunately, as the Germans lost the First World War that broke in 1914, their possessions in Africa in general and in Cameroon in particular, were shared between one French-speaking country and one English-speaking namely France and Britain respectively. France’s portion of German Kamerun was called French Cameroon, where French was made the official language. Britain’s portion was called British Cameroons, where expectedly English was made the official language. In 1961, British Cameroons obtained its autonomy and decided to form a federation with French Cameroon, which had obtained its independence in the year 1960. This led to the introduction of English as the joint official language of the federated country. Today, French and English are the official languages of the country and they enjoy the same official status. From the linguistic perspective, Cameroon is a veritable Aladdin’s cave of languages. According to Chumbo and Simo Bobda citing Tadadjeu (1983), Cameroon has the most complex linguistic situation on the entire continent. Todd (1982) goes further by considering it as part of the most multilingual nations in the globe. Indeed, an inspection of the different languages (248 at least) that we have in Cameroon reveals that, of the four language families or phyla in Africa, only the Khoisan is not represented in Cameroon. Thus, in this linguistic repertoire, languages are distributed among the three (3) of the four (4) major phyla. These are:
- The Afro-Asiatic phylum represented by the Arabic family of the Northern Cameroon.
- The Congo-Kordofanian phylum to the Southwest represented by the Bantu languages and the West Atlantic subgroup (Fulfulde).
- The Nilo-Saharan phylum represented by Kanuri.

This linguistic situation is further complicated by two languages inherited from the colonial masters and which serve as official languages. These are English and French respectively. Apart from them we equally have lingua francas and one hybrid language, Camfranglais.

Kouega (2001) confidently lists as many as five lingua francas. These include: Fulfulde in the north and Adamawa regions, Arab Choa in the far north, Ewondo in the Center and South, Duala in the Littoral and Pidgin English in the Western, Littoral and both Anglophone regions (South West and North West).

**The English language in the Cameroon educational system**

In 1961, when Francophone Cameroon federated with the part of the territory under British administration, it adopted both English and French as the official languages of the new country and opted for official bilingualism as a sound language policy. Soon after, the Government started looking for appropriate measures for the implementation of the opted language policy. The first domain of interest was that of education. In the East, where French was the main medium of instruction, English became a compulsory subject of the school curriculum. Similarly, in the West where English was the main medium of instruction, French became a school subject. Both systems have been operating in the country since then and today the situation is still the same. Thus, in Cameroon there are two sub-systems of education: the Francophone system and the Anglophone one. Each of the two systems has its specificities.

As the Eastern part of the country was under French administration, most administrative, official, governmental, juridical and social issues were based on the French model. In the French subsystem of education, secondary education lasts for seven years and is organised in two distinctive cycles: the first cycle and the second cycle. The first cycle which last for four years is made up of four classes namely: *Sixième*, *Cinquième*, *Quatrième* and *Troisième* abbreviated to *6ème*, *5ème*, *4ème*, *3ème* respectively. In *Quatrième*, one of two other foreign languages that are also used in the domain of education, namely Spanish and German, forms an integral part of the school curriculum and a compulsory official examination subject. At the end of the first cycle, students are awarded a *Brevet d’Études du Premier Cycle* (B.E.P.C) when they pass the official examination. In the second cycle, studies take up to three years and students generally specialize in different domains. Some specialise in mathematics and science and others in “Letters”. Here, the student obtains two distinctive diplomas: the *Probatoire* in the class of *Première* and the *Baccalauréat* in the last class of the second cycle i.e. *Terminale* (*Tle*). One main observation: from 6ème to *Tle*, English is a compulsory school subject and examination paper. The situation is a bit different in the Anglophone subsystem of education.

In the Anglophone subsystem of education, French is also a compulsory school subject from *Form One* (*F1*) up to *Form Five* (*F5*). Unlike the Francophone subsystem where the lower level or first cycle takes four (4) years, in the Anglophone subsystem, it lasts for 5 years (from *F1* to
FV). Thus, students obtain the General Certificate of Education, Ordinary Level (GCE O - Level) in Form Five. The upper secondary level of education (second cycle) here takes only 2 years and students are awarded a GCE A-level upon completion of their studies. What is worth pointing out is that Spanish and German do not form part of the school subjects like in the francophone section.

The syllabus specifications of the English language for Francophone learners: An overview

The syllabus of English for Francophone general secondary schools spells out that English language teaching (ELT) is in a state of constant flux and teachers of English have to be abreast with current trends so that products of the system would not sound outdated in what they do with language (Nkwetisama, 2012). By products, we mean the different actors of the educational system mostly teachers and learners who are directly involved in the teaching/learning process. Thus, according to the syllabus, at the end of secondary school, students for example would have to use the English language to cope with the many varying situations and contexts in which they find themselves at all times. Below are summarised the general objectives of the syllabus of English for Francophones secondary schools:

- Provide Francophone children with English that they will use in their daily life requirements;
- Establish a basis for further work in English;
- Expose learners to other aspects of the English-speaking culture;
- Foster bilingualism and national integration

As can be observed, the syllabus stresses on the use of language in real life situations in the Cameroonian context. It prepares Francophone Cameroonians for good social interactions in their environment by stating the various language skills that are necessary for effective communication. Definitely, language should be taught in such a way that Francophone learners are provided with study skills and strategies to cope with an ever-changing world. In other words, language has to be taught for the purpose of effective communication. The syllabus of English for Francophone learners in secondary schools therefore aims at enabling students to communicate adequately both orally and in writing in real-life situations. Thus, the syllabus is based on the idea that language is meant for communication; it is a social tool that individuals generally use in order to share their experiences, to inform, to communicate ideas and feelings. As such, the syllabus seeks to make every Francophone learner proficient in English which is one of the official languages (the other being French) of the country but which unfortunately is taught only as a school subject. The syllabus is interested to help students develop all communicative skills, which subsume listening, speaking, reading and writing. A scrutiny of the way English is taught in Cameroon secondary schools reveals that this syllabus, unfortunately, is not respected and has some problems. In the textbooks that are designed for the teaching of English to learners, emphasis is led on some aspects. The overall teaching process is examination-oriented. Teachers focus more on the aspects of language that are parts of the official examinations. Such aspects include grammar, vocabulary, essay writing and reading comprehension. In the process of teaching, teachers tend to dwell more on such aspects than on speaking. All communicative skills related to the spoken dimension of language are overlooked.

Understanding the framework of Needs Analysis in the ELT industry

Nowadays, Needs Analysis has become a familiar concept in English language teaching (ELT), teaching English as a second/foreign language TESL/TEFL. History has it that the expression “Needs Analysis” first appeared in India in the 1920s, but it was established formally during the 1970s by the Council of Europe in the field of ESP (White, 1988; Brindley, 1989; Richards, 2001). As Hutchinson and Waters (1987) indicate, the demand for English for Specific Purpose was accelerated in 1970 when the Oil Crisis started, which caused a great flow of money and western expertise into the oil rich countries. Day by day needs for English courses increased with clear goals in English language learning. Today, Needs Analysis serves as a sound theoretical framework in ESL/EFL contexts as it contributes enormously both in the design of the courses and its implementation in the teaching and learning processes. Researchers have realized that it is not practical to attempt to teach the whole of a foreign language, as this will require more time and effort than is practically possible for the majority of learners and teachers alike (Maley and Duff? 1988). It has been argued that even native speakers of the language do not use all their information about their first language (L1), and that much of this information is used passively, i.e. at the recognition level only. Accordingly, focusing on the reasons why learners need to learn the foreign language will better enable language teaching professionals to cater for their learners’ specific needs and save a lot of wasted time and effort.

Needs Analysis defined

Several authors have tried to define the expression ‘Needs Analysis’. One main observation: the definitions vary depending on the purpose of analysis but all take the learner as a focus of analysis. Brown (1995) views Needs Analysis, which he also
called Needs Assessment, as the activities involved in gathering information that will serve as the basis for developing a curriculum that meet the learning needs of a particular group of students. Once identified, needs can be stated in terms of goals and objectives, which, in turn, can serve as the bases for developing tests, materials, teaching activities, and evaluation strategies. The purpose is to fill the “gap” of what a language program “lacks.” This view is particularly important in this study as the researcher, after evaluation, realised that the learners’ needs tend to be taken for granted. The way the designed syllabus is applied cannot permit Francophone learners to get the desired results on completion of secondary school.

Hutchinson and Waters (1992) define needs analysis on the basis of “necessities” and “wants” in order to distinguish between what the learners have to know and what the learners feel they need to know. The focus here is on the “lacks” that represent the gap between the required proficiency in the target situation and the existing proficiency of the learners. This definition views language needs as a process of negotiation between the learners and their society. With regard to Francophone learners’ syllabus, it is expected that each learner could express him/herself in spoken language with relative ease when he or she leaves secondary school.

Witkin and Altschuld (1995) define Needs Analysis as a systematic set of procedures undertaken for the purpose of setting priorities and making decisions about programs. For them, Needs Analysis also involves organizational improvement and allocation of resources. According to this definition, needs analysis should fill the “gap” of needs between the current state of affairs and the desired state of affairs.

The above definitions base their concept of Needs Analysis around the terms “necessities,” “lacks,” “wants,” and “gaps.” However, all these terms have different interpretations from one individual to another. Therefore, linguists in the ESL/EFL field have not agreed exactly on the definition of the term “needs” itself. West (1994) comments on this issue by indicating that the term “needs” lacks a unified definition and remains ambiguous. Richards (2001) argues that the definition of “needs” depends on the perception of those making the judgment. Different interests and values are reflected in the definition. Teachers, learners, administrators, employees, parents, and stakeholders may all have different views as to what needs are. Lawson (1979) re-echoed in Brown (1995) defines “need” as “something that is recognized but is not in any sense ‘discovered’, and its ‘existence’ derives from whatever criteria are thought to be relevant in making the diagnoses.” This implies that in order to recognize “needs” one would have to carry out some kind of assessment or evaluation of the existing situation (as was the case in the present inquiry) and the diagnosis of assessment results would reveal some deficiency. Berwich (1989), borrowing some insights from the field of adult education, defines “need” as the gap between what is and what should be”. The “what is” could be equated to the current state of learner’s knowledge and skills and the “what should be” could be interpreted as the target situation requirements. Robinson (1991) notes that the needs that are established for a particular group of students... will be influenced by the ideological preconceptions of the analyst. A different group of analysts working with the same group of students but with different views on teaching and learning would be highly likely to produce a different set of needs.

Accordingly, the difference between what learners can presently do with the language and what they should be able to do, cannot be looked at from one standpoint. Braine (2001) indicates that linguists disagree on the definition, but they all agree that there are external factors that influence the definition. Factors such as staffing, time, and cultural attitudes should be taken into consideration when conducting needs analysis.

Types of needs are differentiated with reference to the purpose of learning the language, individual differences or the social roles of language in a wider context. Alderson (1980) cited in Richards (2001) differentiates four types of needs. First, formal needs which refer to the need to meet the institution requirements such as to pass an exam. Second, actual or obligation need which refers to what a student has to do with the language once he has learned it. Third, hypothetical future need which refers to the need to become a better professional in the future, and forth, want, which refers to what a student feels he or she wants to do or to learn. The first and the forth are types of needs during the process of learning or “process-oriented” type, while the second and third are types of needs that are “future-oriented”.

Altman (1980) re-echoed in Brown (1995) explains types of learner needs based on individual differences within the framework of learner-centred language teaching. To him, learners should be placed properly based on their age, level of language proficiency, maturity, and time available. This requires the institution to make flexible educational arrangements to allow all learners access to learning that is appropriate to the types of needs they have. In this way, the content and mode of learning will be influenced by the options available at their disposal. The types of modifications of learning resources are made accordingly to meet the kinds of individual differences with regard to time, goals, mode, or expectations of learning.

Widdowson (1981) differentiates “goal-oriented” definition from “process-oriented” definition of needs. The former refers to what the learner needs to do with the language once he or she has learned it, while the latter refers to what the learner needs to do to actually acquire the language. This definition points to the importance of recognizing the present condition of the learner as far as language learning is concerned, and the target situation.
where the learner will be required to use the language. The "goal-oriented" definition has to do with program aims while the "process-oriented" definition relates to pedagogic objectives (Widdowson 1983). Hutchinson and Waters (1987) make a distinction between "target needs" and "learning needs". The target need refers to what the learner needs to do in the target situation and the learning need refers to what the learner needs to do in order to learn. They further subcategorize target need into (1) necessities; what the learner has to know in order to function effectively in the target situation, (2) lacks; the discrepancy between necessity and what the learner already knows, (3) wants; what the learner actually wants to learn or what they feel they need. The learner's "wants" may or may not conform to those perceived by the teachers or course designers. The learning need is equated to the route of learning. This concerns things such as how learners learn the language, why they learn it, and what resources are available to help them learn.

Hutchinson and Waters (1987) conceptualized goal-oriented needs as language use needs and process-oriented needs as learning needs. They used the term "target needs" to refer to the "language use needs" and categorized them into three subcategories, namely necessities, lacks and wants. **Necessities** are what the learner has to know in order to function effectively in the target situation. **Lacks** are the gap between what is required in the target situation and the existing proficiency of the learner. **Wants** are seen as what the learner wants or feels is needed. With regard to learning strategies approach, two types of needs are identified; the learner's preferred strategies for progressing from where they are to where they want to go and the teacher's strategies to help the learners meet their needs.

Richterich (1973) points out that the learning process by being responsive to learners' expressed needs becomes a source of its own change. He distinguished between "Objectives" and "Subjective" needs. This dichotomy was adopted by many needs analysts such as, Nunan (1988), Brindley (1989) and Brown (1995). Objective needs analysis aimed at collecting factual information for setting broad goals related to language content, whereas subjective needs analysis aimed at gathering information about learners, which can be used to guide the learning process once it is underway (Fatihi, 2003).

Berwich (ibid) similarly categorized needs according to their provenance, contrasting felt (subjective) needs and perceived (objective) needs. He defines needs as "a gap or measurable discrepancy between a current state of affairs and a desired future state". This view is very important in this study as there seems to be a mismatch between what is expected from Francophone learners at the completion of their secondary education and the way the teaching activity is carried out. Felt needs refer to the "wants" or "desires", which are derived from insiders and the "perceived needs", are derived from outsiders, from facts, from what is known and can be "verified".

Kharma (1980) cited in Fatihi (2003) discusses societal needs and educational needs. The societal need refers to the need of the community as a whole to acquire and use English for international communication, for trade, technology and cultural purposes. The educational need is the need of an individual to use English in the community. In an EFL setting, this need can be differentiated into general and specific educational needs. The first is related to the cultural, intellectual and affective development of the individual learner. The second is related to specific skills that learners are expected to master such as listening, speaking, reading or writing, or to skill which can be described in terms of language functions.

### The theoretical basis of Needs Analysis

Much of the literature that is used as bases of Needs Analysis is derived from the views of communicative competence also known as Communicative Language Teaching. This method to language teaching advocates the teaching of a language for communicative purposes, not just for the purpose of passing an examination as is the case in most Cameroon secondary schools nowadays. From the historical perspective, Communicative Language Teaching essentially appears to be a product of educators and linguists who had grown dissatisfied with the Audio-lingual and Grammar Translation methods of foreign language instruction. In fact, educators and linguists felt that students were not learning enough realistic, whole language. They did not know how to communicate using appropriate social language, gestures, or expressions; in brief, they were at a loss to communicate in the culture of the language studied. Communicative Language Teaching, that makes use of real-life situations that necessitate communication, saw the light of the day out of that absolute necessity. Communication is a process; it is insufficient for students to simply have knowledge of target language forms, meanings, and functions. Students must be able to apply this knowledge in negotiating meaning (Larsen-Freeman 1986).

Hymes’s (1972) discussion on communicative competence theory covers two aspects: linguistic competence, that is the unconscious knowledge of the language, and linguistic performance, that is the use of language associated with the process of encoding and decoding. Language use is judged not only by grammaticality but also by other aspects such as appropriateness. As Hymes (ibid: 278) puts it, "There are rules of use without which the rules of grammar would be useless". Language use and meaning of utterances also involves aspects that cannot always be explained with reference to formal aspects of language.

Hymes (ibid) mentions four criteria by which
communicative competence can be evaluated. Such points concerned:
- Whether something is formally possible. It relates to grammaticality.
- Whether something is feasible. It relates to psychological acceptability.
- Whether something is appropriate. It relates to sociocultural acceptability.
- Whether something is in fact done, or the speech act is actually performed.

Competence-performance distinction is also extensively discussed in Canale and Swain (1980) as bases for language teaching and testing applications. They refer to Chomsky's weak version of competence as "the fluent native speaker's tacit knowledge of his or her language". (By tacit the author means subconscious because human beings have no conscious awareness of the process involved in speaking or understanding their language) while performance is the "actual use of language in concrete situations". In other words, performance has to do with what people actually say or understand by what someone else says on a given occasion. Thus, performance is concerned with social aspects of language.

Another aspect of the theory of Communicative Competence is drawn from the work of Van Ek's "Threshold Level" (1976) which Canale and Swain (1980) call "basic communication skills". Van Ek's work describes the minimum level of communication skills needed by learners for survival purposes in a second or foreign language setting. Van Ek's model provides a list of basic language functions and notions that are important for the learner. Canale and Swain (1980) suggest that basic communication skills discussed in van Ek's 'Threshold Level' (see 2.1.5) can be considered as a minimum level of communication skills and in language learning these skills should be emphasized from the beginning in order to provide learners with the ability to get meaning across. However, they caution that second language learners may or may not be willing only to develop skills to get meaning across without studying aspects of grammar. Drawing conclusions from studies on second language learning, they state that:

The focus on grammatical competence in the classroom is not a sufficient condition for the development of communicative competence. However, it would be inappropriate to conclude that the development of grammatical competence is irrelevant or unnecessary for the development of communicative competence.

This statement implies that it is reasonable to take the middle way; that is to combine both approaches in instruction where grammatical aspects of the language are incorporated into meaningful communicative practice.

Another theory proposed by Canale and Swain (1980) is to integrate the theories of grammaticality and acceptability on the one hand, to the theory of discourse. In Canale and Swain's (1980) view:

An integrative theory of communicative competence may be regarded as one in which there is a synthesis of knowledge of basic grammatical principles, knowledge of how language is used in social context to perform communicative functions, and knowledge of how utterances and communicative functions can be combined according to the principles of discourse.

This integrative theory of communicative competence is more comprehensive in that it also covers theories of coherence, cohesion, conversational analysis, and speech acts. This section gave significant insights into the theoretical foundation of Needs analysis. In the section below, the researcher shall survey some Needs Analysis models.

Exploring some Needs Analysis Models

Different components to language Needs Analysis are employed to investigate different focuses and issues in language planning, development, teaching and learning. The theoretical aspect of the Needs Analysis is based on TSA (Target Situation Analysis) and PSA (Present Situation Analysis) components. To some scholars, TSA and PSA are the fundamental components for assessing language needs of learners. Of noteworthy is the fact that TSA and PSA are interwoven: they g hand in glove. Munby (1978) argues that PSA represents constraints on the TSA. Accounting for the interrelationship between TSA and PSA, McDonough (1984) outlined that PSA involves ‘fundamental variables’, which must be clearly considered before the TSA. In practice, one is likely to seek and find information relating to both TSA and PSA simultaneously. Thus, Needs Analysis may be seen as a combination of TSA and PSA.

Target situation analysis (TSA)

What exactly is TSA? The expression ‘Target Situation Analysis’ was introduced by Chambers (1980) in his article a re-evaluation of needs analysis. This model has remained highly influential in the field of ESL/ESP Needs Analysis. It was the first Needs Analysis model based on the concept of communicative competence. Munby's categories of communicative activities and their relation to the communicative events of the target situation reflect categories of real world language use (West, 1994). In other words, they reflect the shift in the ESL/EFL field from language system to language use. As a result of this shift, most studies continue to follow this model in relating communicative needs to analysis of communication in the target situation. Consequently, Needs Analysis has become an integral element of the field of ESL as the basis for designing EFL courses (Dudley-Evans, 1991). Target Situation Analysis focuses on identifying the learners’ language requirements in the occupational or
academic situation they are being prepared for (West, 1994). In order words, TSA refers to task and activities learners will be using English for. Robinson (1991: 8) argues that a Needs Analysis, which focuses on students’ needs at the end of a language course, can be called a TSA (Target Situation Analysis). According to Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998:124), TSA includes objective, perceived and product-oriented needs. They explain that the objective and perceived needs are derived by outsiders from facts, from what is known and can be verified. Therefore, to be able to spell or pronounce English words correctly is an objective/perceived need. Product-oriented needs are derived from the goal or target situation. For example, at the completion of their secondary school, it is expected that each Francophone learner will be able to communicate with other users of English in different contexts.

In brief, TSA has remained highly influential in the field of ESL/EFL Needs Analysis. It played a vital role. However, this model has received major criticism for being inflexible. The initial Target Situation Analysis model by Munby was comprehensive and complex because his aim was to provide a wide range of needs profiles. However, he did not specify any priorities for his model of activities. This creates difficulties when applying the profile to different language situations (West, 1994). Practitioners overcome this difficulty by using different profiles based on their own circumstances.

**Approaches to Needs Analysis**

A variety of approaches to needs analysis have been proposed by linguists over the years. From the beginning of Needs Analysis in the 1970s up till date, there is gradually development in its approaches from simple to complex and from complex to more purposeful and comprehensive or from target-centred to learning-centred. Nowadays, trainers, teachers and school administrators run the language courses more effectively by using different kinds of approaches to Needs Analysis. Below is a survey of each approach.

The first approach to be developed was known as the “Threshold Level” by Van Ek, (1975). This approach was used by the team of specialists under the guidance of the Council of Europe. The purpose of this approach was, as Cunningsworth (1983) explains, “to facilitate the learners in their ability to tackle everyday situations in their work or study context”. There were two steps: one was to define the target group and the other was to define the situation in which the learners would need to be able to use English. Using the steps the learners’ needs are derived. The focus in this approach was on the language used and target needs. The author uses van Ek’s “Threshold Level” as bases for Needs Analysis. The specifications of learners' target needs are designed to equip learners to "maintain themselves in most everyday situations, including situations for which they have not been specifically trained". Although specifications of needs cover those situations that adequately serve learner needs at this level, Cunningsworth (ibid) comments that they are based on intuition and subjective judgment and that this subjectivity would, in turn, influence the syllabus designer to rely on his subjective judgment.

In 1978, Munby in his famous book *Communicative syllabus design: A sociolinguistic model for defining the content of purpose-specific language programmes*, formulates the best-known framework of TSA type of Needs Analysis. The title is quite suggestive as the Munby Needs Analysis approach is a tool for syllabus design, which provides a detailed profile of learners and what they need to be able to do after the course or what they need to study during the course. In addition, the analysis also provides a specification of language skills, functions and forms that are required in order to carry out communication types as described in the needs profile. This approach consists of two stages: Communicative Needs Processor (CNP) and the interpretation of the profile of needs derived from the CNP in terms of micro-skills and micro-functions (Ha, 2005). The Communication Needs Process profile seeks to present a valid specification of the skills and linguistic forms that a group of learners needs in the intended target situation. The Communication Needs Process model contained

**Present Situation Analysis (PSA)**

Present Situation Analysis is the second major model in Needs Analysis. It was proposed by Richterich and Chancerel (1980) in their famous book *Identifying the Needs of Adults Learning a Foreign Language*. According to Robinson (1991), “PSA seeks to establish what the students are like at the start of their language course, investigating their strengths and weaknesses”. Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998) state that PSA estimates strengths and weaknesses in language, skills and learning experiences. Richterich and Chancerel (ibid) formulate the most extensive range of devices for establishing the PSA. They suggest that there are three basic sources of information: the students themselves, the language-teaching establishment, and the ‘user-institution’, for example the students’ place of work. For each of these, an ESL/EFL practitioner seeks information regarding their respective levels of ability; their resources; and their views on language teaching and learning. ESL/EFL practitioners might also study the surrounding society and cultural elements: the attitude held towards English language and towards the learning and use of a foreign language.
nine components (e.g., participant, purposive domain, setting, interaction, instrumentality, dialect, target level, communicative event, and communicative key). Each component asks questions about the use of the target language in order to identify learners’ real world communicative requirements. The outcome is used as an input to prepare the intended group of learners for their intended use of the target language through converting the needs profile into a communicative competence specification that is presented in a form of a syllabus (Jordan, 1997). Although Munby’s approach was a great effort in the field of ESP yet some aspects were not given attention, such as learners’ own needs, future needs just to name the few.

Holec (1980) cited in Jordan (1997) proposes “self-directed learning” approach to learner needs. This approach is based on the principle that “to teach the learner to learn is to enable him to carry out the various steps which make up the learning process. This “autonomy” of the learner enables appropriate solutions to be found for the problems of differences in the needs thus, narrowing considerably the gap between what the learner wants to learn and what he does in fact learn”. Under this approach, the learner has the “autonomy” to determine the level of knowledge he wants to achieve, the communicative behaviour he believes he will need, the level of competence he wishes to reach, or the objectives he wants to accomplish.

Richterich and Chancerel (ibid) proposes a “systemic approach” to Needs Analysis. This work was done as part of the project for Council of Europe. As the name suggests, the analysis involves administrators who are involved in teaching, teachers and learners - all parties that are involved in language teaching/learning. This approach places the learner as the centre of the system and decisions concerning objectives, assessment and curriculum are designed with reference to the learner’s resources. The information for Needs Analysis is collected from the learner, the teaching institution and society.

Deficiency Analysis is another well-known approach to Needs Analysis. This approach to Needs Analysis, which has been developed to take account of learners’ present, needs/wants, as well as the requirements of the target situation, may be called analysis of learners’ deficiencies or lacks (Allwright 1982). Actually, it was designed to fill the gap between target needs and the present abilities of the learners. Many of systems taking this approach include two central components: (a) an inventory of potential target needs expressed in terms of activities, and (b) a scale that is used for the priority that should be given to each activity (West, 1997).

Altman (1980) proposes “learner-cantered approach” to analyze the learner needs in language teaching. He recognizes that learners have individual characteristics and differences and that the differences should be addressed accordingly through appropriate instructions. In the learning process, the instruction is designed in such a way to meet individual needs and to allow each individual to develop his or her potentials. The learner needs, abilities and interests determine the form and design of the language curriculum. This learner-cantered language teaching is based on the premise that every learner is uniquely different and that all learners do not learn a foreign language equally well with the same pace. Therefore, learning materials, mode of learning and time allocations are adapted to suit different individual preferences. Altman (1980) provides a table which accommodates learners’ differences with eight different patterns of learning arrangements and modifications to meet individual learning needs.

Benesch (1996) cited in Richards (2001) develops a “critical approach” to Needs Analysis in the area of writing skill for ESL students in which students are trained to develop their skills to evaluate topics through writing assignments. Her writing course was paired with a psychology class and she considered this class as the target situation because it was the students’ major. The assignments for the students were taken from topics discussed in the psychology lectures. Among others, students were assigned either individually or in small groups to review lecture notes, write questions about the psychology lectures for class discussions, rewrite research papers on a particular topic discussed in the psychology class.

Means analysis is another sound approach to Needs Analysis. Because of some practicalities and constraints in the failure of Munby’s (1978) model, some of linguists supported the notion that the constraints and plans should be explored in the local environment/situation. This approach was called means analysis or the ecological approach. According to this view the question for the course designer is how to make ESL/EFL root, grow, bear fruit and propagate in the local soil. The course designer or teacher first identifies the relevant features of the situation (the ecosystem) then sees how the positive features can be used to advantage to accommodate what would conventionally be seen as constraints (West, 1997).

The potential usefulness of Needs Analysis

The potential usefulness of Needs Analysis cannot be underestimated. This can be substantiated by the fact that Needs Analysis acts as a starting point or a guide for course design, syllabus design, course materials selection, assessment or even classroom activities.

Berwich (1989) says that Needs Analysis is important for decision planners to design the course. A similar observation was made by Hawkey (1980) who pointed out that Needs Analysis is a tool for course designer. And this presupposes a "language training situation with
reasonably specific occupational or educational objectives involving a reasonably homogeneous group of learners". Given the information about learner needs, a course designer will be able to produce a specification of language skills, functions, and forms as required in the learner needs profile.

In the same line of thought, McDonough (1984) states that the language needs of the learner should be the bases for course development. He mentions that "information on his or her language needs will help in drawing up a profile to establish coherent objectives, and take subsequent decisions on course content"

Riddell (1991) equally notices the crucial role that Needs Analysis plays in syllabus and course design. As the author observes, through Needs Analysis, "the course designer becomes equipped to match up the content of the program with the requirements of the student body [what learners need]". Focussing on Non Native contexts, he considers teaching materials as an important factor. Teachers can use published materials, adapt or write in house materials. Whatever option is taken, the assessment of student needs has to be taken into consideration

In the same manner, Bowers (1980) quoted in West (1994) realised the importance of Needs Analysis as a guide in syllabus development, materials and examination. He outlined that "the first step in any language teaching project must surely be to design a syllabus that will reflect the language needs and wishes of the learner concerned, and that will accord with a responsible theory of language learning".

Needs Analysis is equally considered as the first step that any course planner should take. This conception is clear in Palmer and McKay (1978) quoted in Schutz and Derwing (1981) who were ready to notice that:

*Many well-intentioned language programs [...] have foundered because either no consideration was given to the actual use the learner intended to make of the language or because the list of uses drawn up by the course designer was based on imagination rather than an objective assessment of the learner's situation, and proved to be inaccurate and in many cases entirely inappropriate to his real needs.*

Recognizing that language problems can also be traced through sociological context, Schutz and Derwing (ibid: 31) agree that, "a detailed analysis of the situations of language use is a pre-requisite even to the selection of the particular linguistic forms or structures that ought to be taught".

Brindley (1980:64) argues that objective needs should be used as a starting point in course design. This is clear in the following assertion:

*If instruction is to be centred on the learners and relevant to their purposes, then information about their current and desired interaction patterns and their perceived difficulties is clearly helpful in establishing program goals which in turn can be translated into learning objectives.*

He further states that Needs Analysis is essential in two different ways, as a guide in setting broad goals, and as a guide in the learning process. The importance of Needs Analysis is also recognized in the learner-centred language teaching. In this system, the learner and the teacher need to continuously share information as to what the learner wants or needs to study during the course. Needs Analysis should be carried out throughout the course in order to adjust the learning objectives as the need arises. In other words, feedback from the learner can be used as bases for modifying learning objectives. Savage and Storer (1992) discuss the role that learners can have in the process of Needs Assessment. In the light of their conception, learners can contribute substantially to the course if they are actively involved at all stages of the course design; at the initial, during, and final stages of course evaluation. This, unfortunately, is never the case in the Francophone subsystem of education in Cameroon. Learners seem to be excluded in the teaching process. The process is carried out following the teacher-centred paradigm.

**CONCLUSION**

This research endeavour sought to provide a descriptive account of a new framework that must serve a basic for curriculum development, course designing and language assessment. As the world has become a global village with English acting the popular lingua franca, it is important Cameroon’s official bodies in general, and the Ministry of secondary education in particular, take into consideration this new framework for a better designing or implementation the curriculum and the setting of more realistic goals, a prerequisite for effective communication in the language.

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