



## NEEDS ANALYSIS AS THE CORNERSTONE OF AN ESP CLASS OF THE MERCHANT MARINE ACADEMY

**Evangelia Giovanoglou<sup>i</sup>**

Visiting Professor of English Language,  
Merchant Marine Academy of Crete,  
Greece

### **Abstract:**

Needs analysis is a crucial element in designing effective English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses, particularly for adult learners in professional or academic settings. This study explores the importance of needs analysis in an ESP course for Merchant Marine Academy students, focusing on their linguistic, professional, and personal goals in learning Maritime English. Given that English serves as a lingua franca in the maritime industry, proficiency in the language is essential for both academic success and career advancement. The study examines the current ESP teaching situation, highlighting the challenges posed by the mandated curriculum and course materials. While the designated textbook covers technical maritime terminology and professional communication, its difficulty level often exceeds students' proficiency, necessitating a more tailored approach to instruction. Needs analysis helps bridge this gap by identifying both objective needs—such as language tasks required in real-world maritime contexts—and subjective needs, including learners' attitudes, expectations, and motivations. Findings suggest that incorporating learner input through surveys, interviews, and self-assessments leads to a more student-centered syllabus, increasing engagement and motivation. As adult learners with prior maritime experience, these students can actively contribute to shaping their curriculum, making learning more relevant and effective. Ultimately, this study underscores the role of needs analysis in enhancing ESP instruction and calls for future research on its impact on student performance in Maritime English.

**Keywords:** English for Specific Purposes, Maritime English, needs analysis, the teacher's role

### **1. Introduction**

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) is a specialized branch of English language teaching that focuses on designing courses tailored to learners' professional and academic needs.

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<sup>i</sup> Correspondence: email [linascarlet@yahoo.gr](mailto:linascarlet@yahoo.gr)

As defined by Johnson & Johnson (1998:105), ESP courses are structured for groups with identifiable purposes and specific linguistic requirements. This article examines how beneficial it could be to try and determine the learning needs, goals, and attitudes of a class of Merchant Marine Academy students towards Maritime English. In that sense, needs analysis is a key component in designing effective English language courses, especially for adult learners. Unlike following a more standardized curriculum, adult classes can be characterized by diverse learning goals and motivations. Conducting thorough needs analysis ensures that the course content aligns with their specific linguistic, professional, and personal objectives, making learning more relevant and effective.

## **2. A descriptive account of the ESP teaching situation**

The individuals being discussed are students currently in their fifth semester at the Merchant Marine Academy of Crete, all of whom are mandated to attend classes in this state institution with a curriculum set by the Ministry of Shipping and Island Policy. According to Dudley-Evans & St John's (1998) classification of the ESP situation, it can be said that it is Category 3. Maritime English is necessary for their academic and professional success. This specific subject is ancillary, with only two teaching hours a week and treating English as a foreign language. The designated course book, "Maritime English, Volume II," supplied by the ministry, caters to the needs of semesters IV, V, and VI. With 15 units, the book covers diverse technical aspects of maritime engineering and seafaring professions. Its difficulty spans from Upper Intermediate (B2) to Proficiency (C2), posing a challenge for most students at the B' level, except for a few who are quite proficient in English. The book not only addresses the engineering aspects of their future profession but also emphasizes the importance of acquiring linguistic proficiency in English, as it can be inferred by the use of difficult vocabulary and complex texts. This is crucial, given their future multicultural working environment, where English serves as a Lingua Franca among non-native speakers.

## **3. The importance of needs analysis**

After Brindley's findings (1989), it was made clear that there is a distinctive difference between what learners and teachers expect to be the desired procedure during a learning course. While teachers adopt a more cognitive approach that would lead to independent and active learners, students tend to focus on a more behaviorist view where the teacher is expected to transmit knowledge through structures and rules. The above indicates the necessity of needs analysis as the core of designing and implementing effective language teaching programs. The aim should be the identification and description of the language needs of the learners in a specific context in order to design a course and select appropriate tasks to meet those needs. A thorough needs analysis opts for shedding light on the target situation, the context and tasks the learners will actually use the language for, in other words, the objective needs for the course (Zorbas *et al.*, 2018). Parallel to that

the subjective needs should be taken into account, keeping in mind what the students' expectations from the course are and their attitude towards both the second language and the learning process. Viewing the ESP process, the ESP student is elevated to not only being the key stakeholder but also to an active participant in it. He is not to be treated as a child; apart from the fact that he is an adult, he is conscious of both the learning process and of his own learning preferences and style (Rogers, 1996)

Unlike courses for children, ESP classes often take place for practical purposes, such as career advancement, academic study, or social integration. As Hutchinson and Waters (1987) maintain, "*What distinguishes ESP (English for Specific Purposes) from General English is not the existence of a need as such, but rather an awareness of the need.*" In the case of the Academy, the scholars of the fifth semester are young adults from the age of 20 to 24, the majority of whom have attended English language lessons before and have acquired a degree. Most of them have also gained experience in the occupation itself, as they have finished the four months of apprenticeship. This renders them capable of expressing opinions about their academic level and how it will affect their vocational fulfillment. This indicates that they have both a concrete goal and an expectation as to why Maritime English is necessary. Taking their wants, goals and possible lacks into account can shift the focus from a one-size-fits-all approach to a learner-centered curriculum. Various tools such as surveys, interviews and self-assessments can be used to collect data on students' language proficiency, goals, and preferred learning strategies. This way the syllabus can be elevated into a powerful tool that will guide the class towards a destination set by the same individuals that attend it.

Dornyei (2001) states that "*motivation is one of the key factors that determine the rate and success of second language attainment.*" A well-conducted needs analysis ensures that materials and activities are meaningful, reducing dropout rates and increasing learner satisfaction. When adult learners, in our case, the students of the Merchant Marine Academy, see a direct connection between their coursework and real-life applications, they are more likely to stay motivated and committed. They are willing to participate more actively and appreciate the value of an otherwise theoretical subject. Paraphrasing Davies (2006), by asking class-specific questions and focusing on the local classroom content, learners feel more valuable and more engaged. As for this, it is important to investigate where the students stand on their objective goals for the course. Since it is more likely to engage in language learning if they feel that their individual wants and goals are taken into account, the reasons for studying should be explored as well as their attitudes towards communicating using the target language. As they are adult students, they can be more than capable of expressing their views on the above matters. The focus on the learners' opinion about their ability to cope with the tasks in the book and whether those are helpful in acquiring the skills can be the compass that might lead to a transformation and an adjustment to the curriculum in order to cover the ESP learners' needs.

#### 4. Conclusion

Taking the ESP learners' experience and expectations into account, the ESP practitioner ought to incorporate them in the syllabus in order to fulfill a positive outcome from this course. The ESP teacher plays a pivotal role in integrating these tools into the syllabus, ensuring that students develop the linguistic and practical skills required for success in their future careers. Future research should explore the effectiveness of needs analysis and its impact on student performance in Maritime English. By doing this, the ESP curriculum can evolve to better meet the needs of maritime students, equipping them with the language proficiency and practical communication skills necessary for their professional endeavors.

#### Conflict of Interest Statement

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

#### About the Author

Evangelia Giovanoglou is an English Language teacher. She received a Bachelor's degree in English Language and Literature from the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece and a Master's degree from the Hellenic Open University, Greece. She has been active in teaching English as a foreign language in the private sector since 2007. Her current field placement is with the Merchant Marine Academy of Crete, Greece as a visiting professor for the subject of Maritime English. She is interested in intercultural classes and teaching English for Specific Purposes.

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