

# Needs analysis and language learning: Unlocking opportunities for successful language programs



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Free Webinar Series: Current Directions in  
Postsecondary Language Program Administration



# Outcomes of this webinar

In today's session we will:

- Define key concepts related to “needs” and “needs analysis” (NA)
- Explore the historical development of needs and NA in language education
- Identify and sequence the key stages of a NA
- Evaluate various NA data collection methods and tools
- Recognize the informants and sources that contribute to a NA
- Assess the role of stakeholders' perspectives in conducting a NA
- Compare findings from relevant NA studies in current literature
- Understand the impact of NA upon language programs
- Explain the importance of NA in designing successful language programs

# Basic references

- Bocanegra-Valle, A. (2016). Needs analysis for curriculum design. In K. Hyland & P. Shaw (Eds.), *The Routledge handbook of English for academic purposes* (pp. 560-576). Routledge. <https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9781315657455.ch42>
- **Bocanegra-Valle, A. (Forthcoming 2025). Needs analysis for language program development and administration. In A. V. Brown, C. Crane, B. C. Dupuy & E. Ene (Eds.), *The Routledge handbook of language program development and administration*. Routledge.**
- Bocanegra-Valle, A. (Forthcoming 2026). Needs analysis for curriculum design in academic settings. In K. Hyland & P. Thompson (eds.). *The Routledge Handbook of English for academic purposes, 2nd edition*. Routledge.

# Overview

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Lessons learnt from current literature

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Key takeaways

# What is needs analysis?

“The **systematic collection and analysis** of all subjective and objective information necessary **to define and validate defensible curriculum** purposes that satisfy the language learning requirements of students within the context of particular institutions that influence the learning and teaching situation”

(Brown, 2016, p. 4)

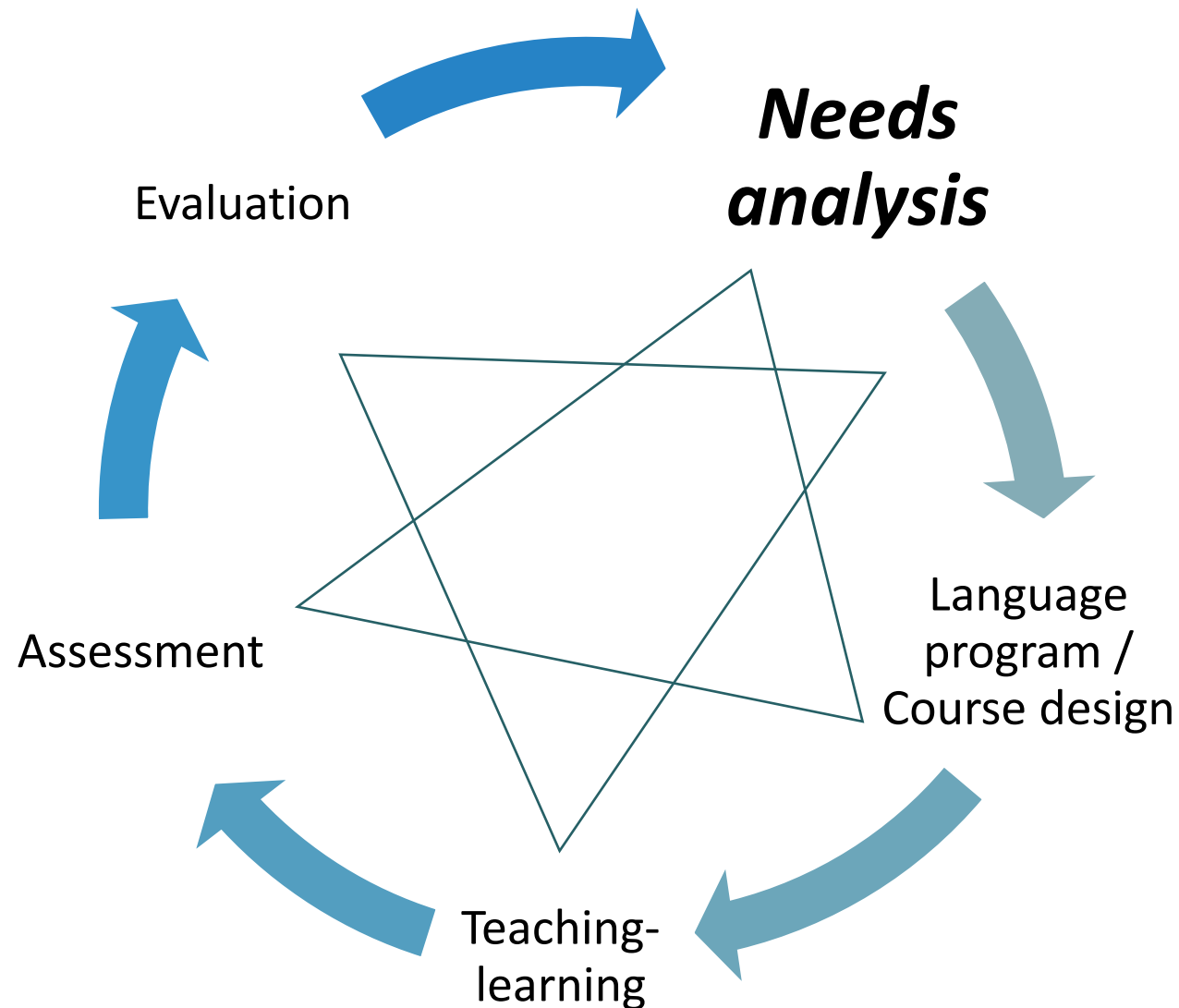
“Needs analysis is (...) **the first step in the course-design cycle** (...) and refers to the **systematic analysis of what learners need** in order to operate in the target communicative situation”

(Woodrow, 2018, p. 21)

“Needs analysis plays a central role in the **development, revision and evaluation of [language] courses and instructional materials** (...) the basis for curriculum development, either in terms of **devising a new curriculum or in evaluating and revising a current curriculum** (...) is a **process that involves the collection and evaluation** of information”

(Basturkmen, 2025, pp. 11-12)

# What is needs analysis?



Needs analysis is carried out to establish the *what* and the *how* of a course.

Needs analysis is the first stage in course development, followed by curriculum design, materials selection, methodology, assessment, and evaluation.

(Flowerdew, 2013; Hyland, 2006)

(Based on Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998; Flowerdew, 2013; Woodrow, 2018)

# Quick Poll ...

**Have you ever conducted a needs analysis?**

**Are you planning to conduct a needs analysis in the near future?**

**In your needs analysis, whose needs have you analyzed / will you analyze?**



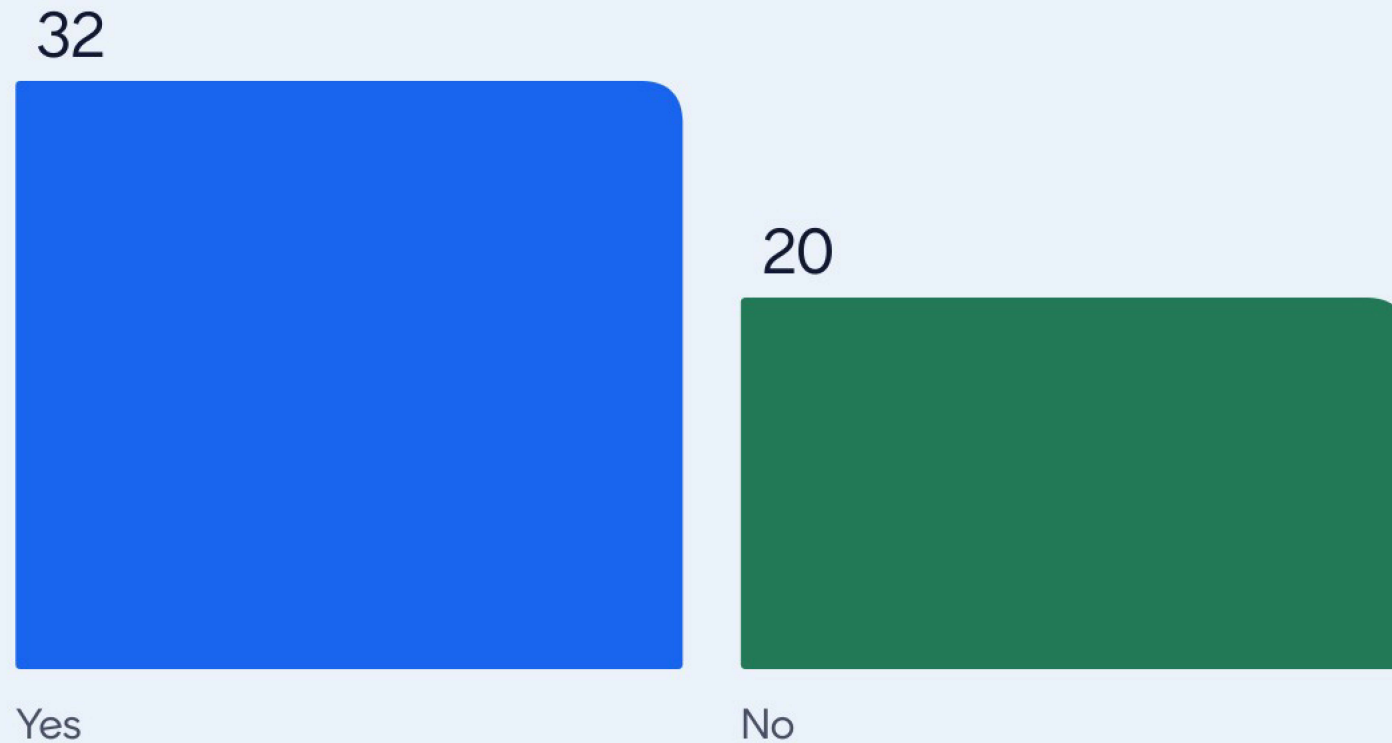
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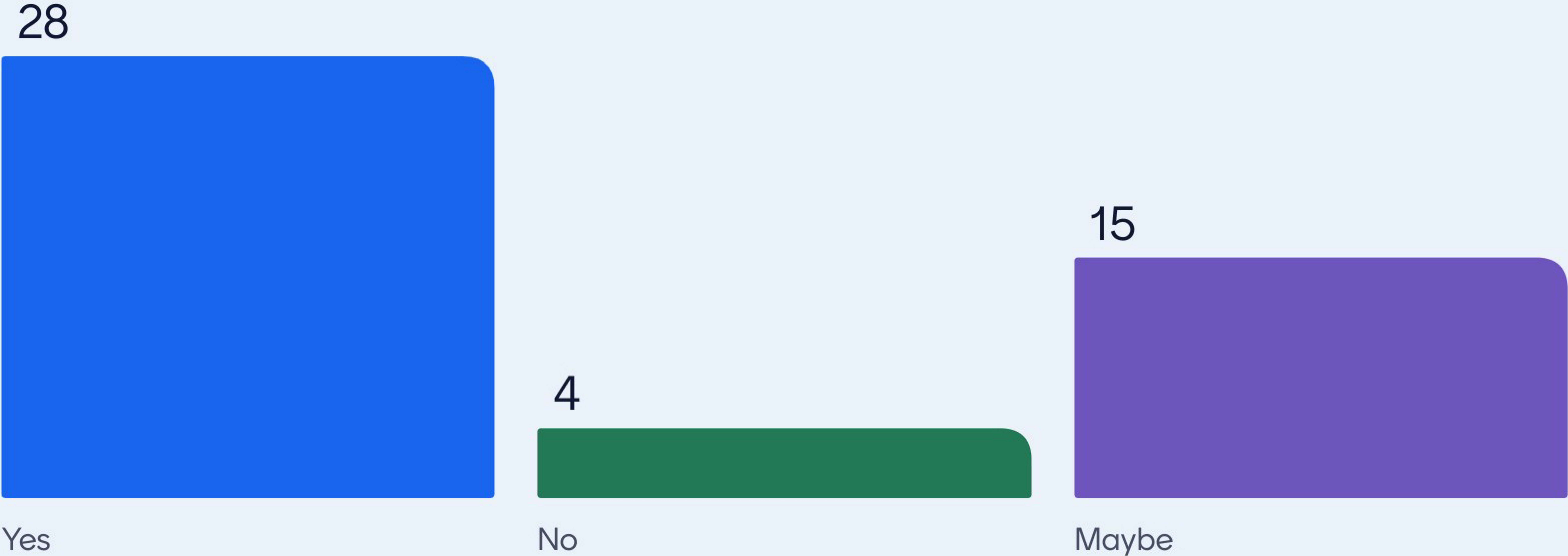




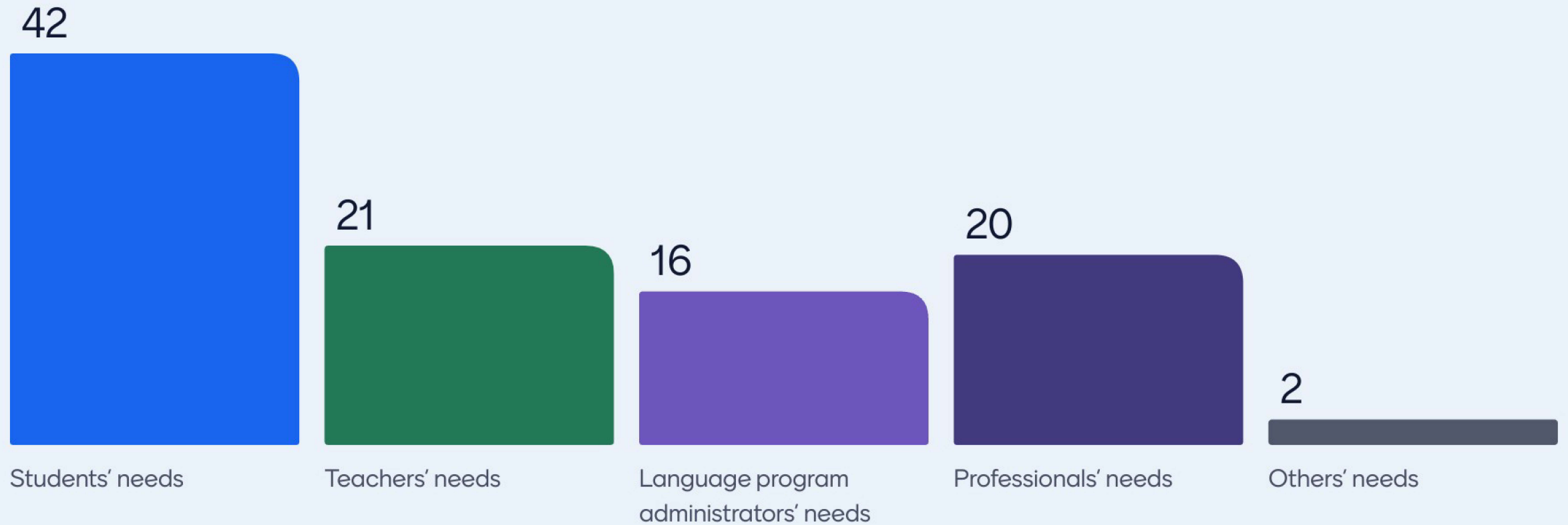
# Have you ever conducted a needs analysis?



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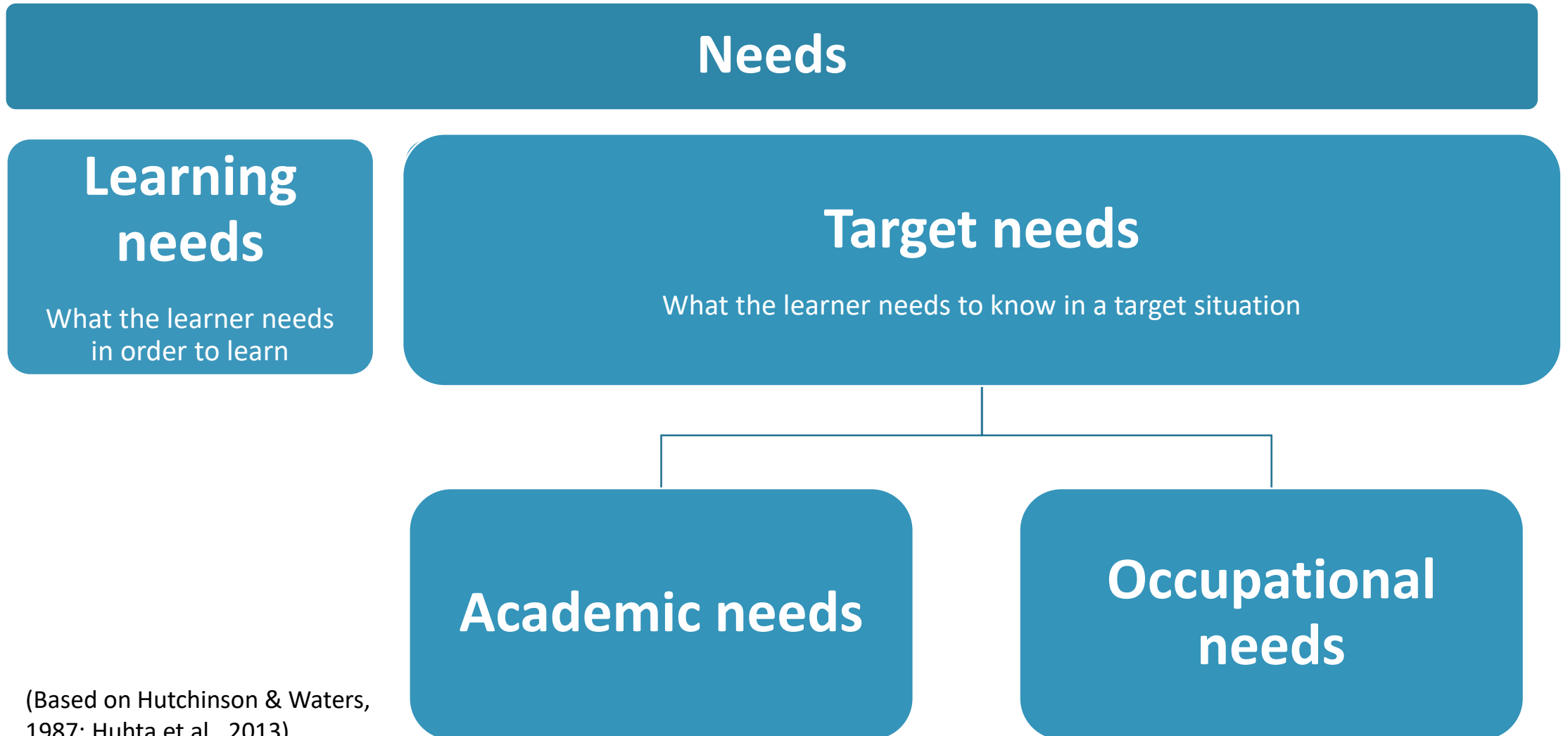
In your needs analysis, whose needs have you analyzed / will you analyze?



# The construct of *needs*



# The construct of *needs*



(Based on Hutchinson & Waters, 1987; Huhta et al., 2013)

# The construct of *needs*

## Needs

### Learning needs

What the learner needs in order to learn

### Target needs (academic / occupational)

What the learner needs to know in an academic or occupational target situation

#### Necessities

Type of need determined by the target situation

#### Lacks

What existing gaps need to be filled from the teaching perspective

#### Wants

What the learner perceives as a lack

**Society, companies, employers**

**Teachers**

**Language learners**

(Based on Hutchinson & Waters, 1987; Huhta et al., 2013)

# Needs as necessities, lacks and wants

Liu, J. Y. et al. (2011). Is what I need what I want? Reconceptualising college students' needs in English courses for general and specific/academic purposes. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, 10, 271-280.

Four skills	Necessities	Wants	Lacks
<b>Listening</b>	Listen to daily English conversations	Listen to daily English conversations	Listen to English news
<b>Speaking</b>	Introduce oneself in English	Converse with others in fluent English	Speak English with foreigners socially
<b>Reading</b>	Read English letters and E-mails	Read English newspapers and magazines	Read English newspapers and magazines
<b>Writing</b>	Write basic personal information	Write personal basic information	Write English assignments

Summary of the most necessary, desirable, and insufficient four skills in EGP courses (Liu et al, 2011, p. 277)

# The construct of *needs*



(Huhta et al., 2013, p. 13; Robinson, 1991)



# The construct of *needs*



**Subjective/felt needs**

(by learners)



**Objective/perceived  
needs**

(by teachers, course designers,  
program administrators,  
institutions, society)







# Overview

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Key  
concepts

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of needs  
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# Evolution of needs analysis

First-generation analyses

**Target-situation analysis:** Identification of what the learners should ideally know and be able to do in the study situation they wish to enter or advance in

**Discourse or language-situation analysis:** Descriptions of the language used in the target situation, that learners need to learn

**Present-situation analysis:** Identification of personal communicative needs: what learners do/not know and can/not do in relation to the demands of the target situation

**Learner factor or strategy analysis:** Identification of learners' learning styles, strategies, and learner factors, how learners learn and their perceptions of needs and wants in relation to the course

**Teaching context or means analysis:** Identification of factors related to the environment in which the course will run, what course and teacher can realistically offer, what can be achieved with the available sources for a given situation

**Task-based analysis:** Identification of target tasks (primary unit) followed by the identification of representative samples of target discourse or language use for the accomplishment of target tasks

Second-generation analyses

*Based on discussions in Basturkmen, 2010; Bocanegra-Valle, 2016, 2025; Brown, 2016; Flowerdew, 2013; Huhta et al., 2013; Upton, 2012.*

**Ethnographic analysis**  
**Critical-oriented (Rights) analysis**  
**Corpus-based analysis**



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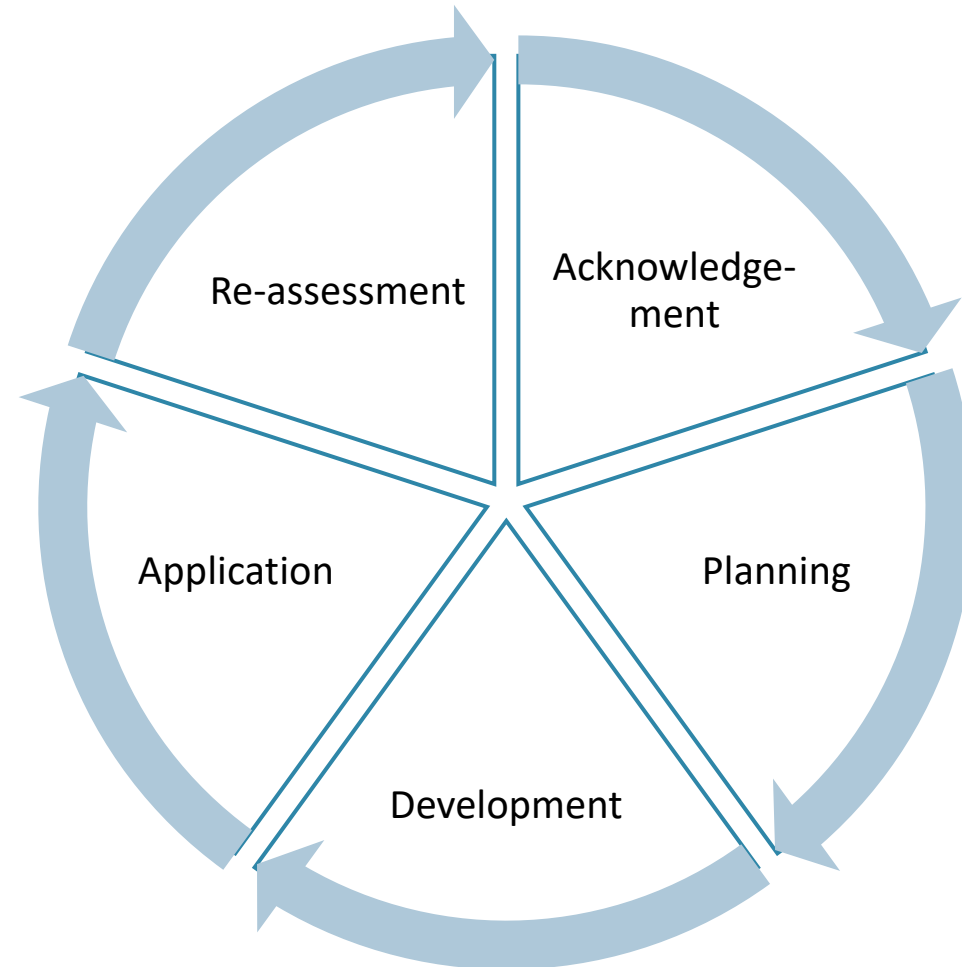
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Conducting  
an effective  
needs  
analysis

# Stages in needs analysis

*Based on discussions in Basturkmen, 2010; Bocanegra-Valle, 2025; Brown, 2009, 2016; Jordan, 1997; Serafini, Lake & Long, 2015; Woodrow, 2018.*

Needs analysis is an iterative process that requires meticulous planning and development in five stages



# Stages in needs analysis

*Based on discussions in Basturkmen, 2010; Bocanegra-Valle, 2025; Brown, 2009, 2016; Jordan, 1997; Serafini, Lake & Long, 2015; Woodrow, 2018.*

## Acknowledgement: Become aware

- Acknowledge the need for course development and program assessment, refinement, and improvement
- Note the benefits of a NA for successful course design and language program development
- Envisage clear responses to related questions



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- Will a needs analysis be useful for this language program?
- Whose needs are to be analyzed?
- What type of needs merit examination?
- Can a needs analysis be conducted in this educational setting?
- When and how will the needs analysis be conducted?
- Are teachers and administrators ready to refine and renew the language program in accordance with the insights gained?
- Are teachers ready to face changes that might affect their teaching practice and professional development?
- Is administration ready in all respects to support and bring about requested changes?

# Stages in needs analysis

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Planning: Get ready to do the NA

- Establish the purpose of the analysis
- Consult previous analyses and research studies
- Identify stakeholders and sources of info
- Delimit the student population
- Decide upon approach(es) and syllabus(es)
- Acknowledge constraints/limitations
- Select data collection methods



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- Is a new language program going to be devised?
- Is a language program going to be refined?
- Is a language program going to be updated?
- Are there mismatches between language program planning and implementation?
- Do methodologies and materials need changes?
- Do we need language policies going that respond to language learners' needs?



# Stages in needs analysis

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***How does a needs analysis relate to language teachers' everyday teaching practice?***



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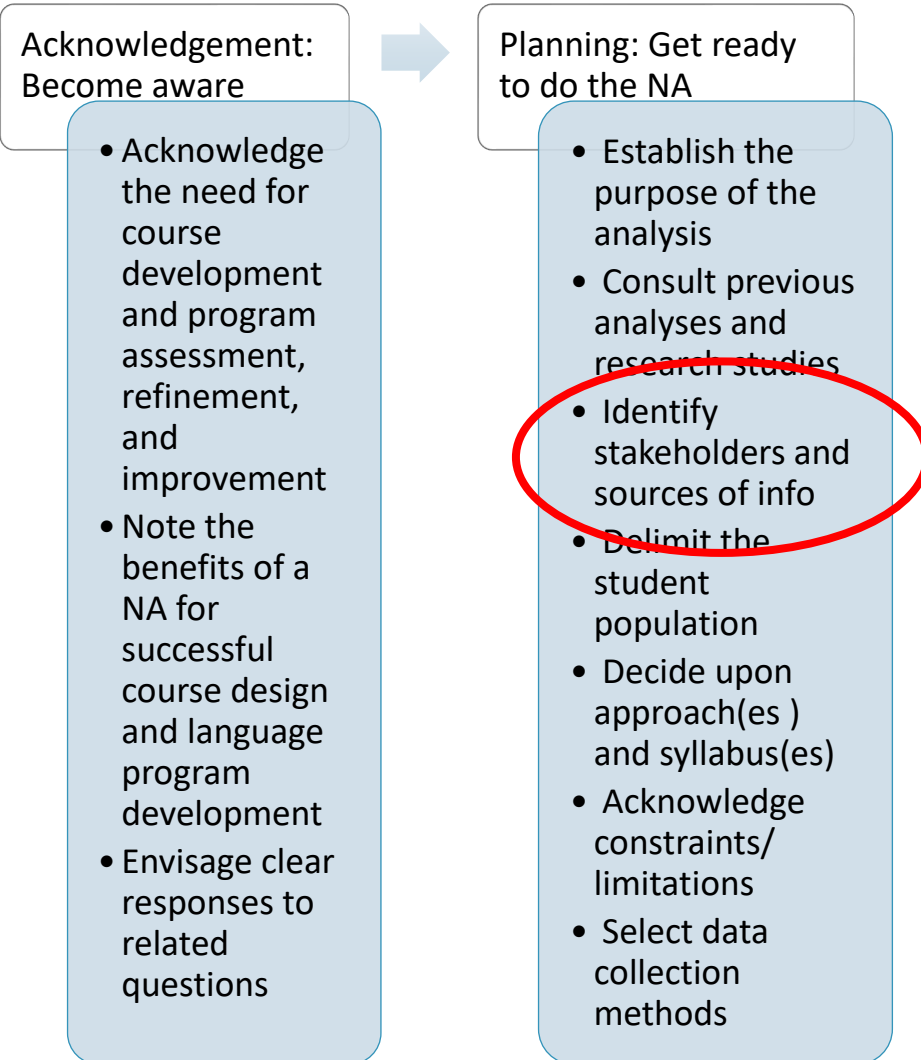
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# Stages in needs analysis

Based on discussions in Basturkmen, 2010; Bocanegra-Valle, 2025; Brown, 2009, 2016; Jordan, 1997; Serafini, Lake & Long, 2015; Woodrow, 2018.



## Participants in a needs analysis

### *Whose needs?*

- Language learners
- Language teachers
- Program administrators

### *Who conducts a need analysis?*

- Language teachers
- Program administrators

### *Who are the informants in a need analysis?*

- Primary stakeholders
- Secondary stakeholders
- Third-level stakeholders
- Sources of information

# Who are the informants in a needs analysis?



**PRIMARY STAKEHOLDERS**  
Present students (graduates, master, doctoral)  
Former students (Alumni)  
Language teachers

**SECONDARY STAKEHOLDERS**  
Language program administrators | Faculty  
Content teachers | Domain experts  
Educational authorities



**TERTIARY STAKEHOLDERS**  
Employers | Professionals  
Company / Industry representatives  
Government administrators | Society

**SOURCES**  
Publications | Unpublished literature  
Institutional papers | Working papers  
Language policy plans | General policy docs  
Course syllabi | Pedagogical artifacts



# Sample studies

Ji, T. (2021). A needs-analysis-based survey of the curriculum design for undergraduate translation majors: Exemplified by Qinghai Normal University. *Open Journal of Modern Linguistics*, 11(4), 555–565.



70 students  
12 human resources managers in translation and foreign trade companies  
20 administrators in government units

Trujeque-Moreno, E. E. et al. (2021). Needs analysis in the English for Specific Purposes (ESP) approach: The case of the Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla. *MEXTESOL Journal*, 45(2), 1–23.



191 students  
10 professors  
6 administrators (1 general director, 1 administrative coordinator, 4 program coordinators)

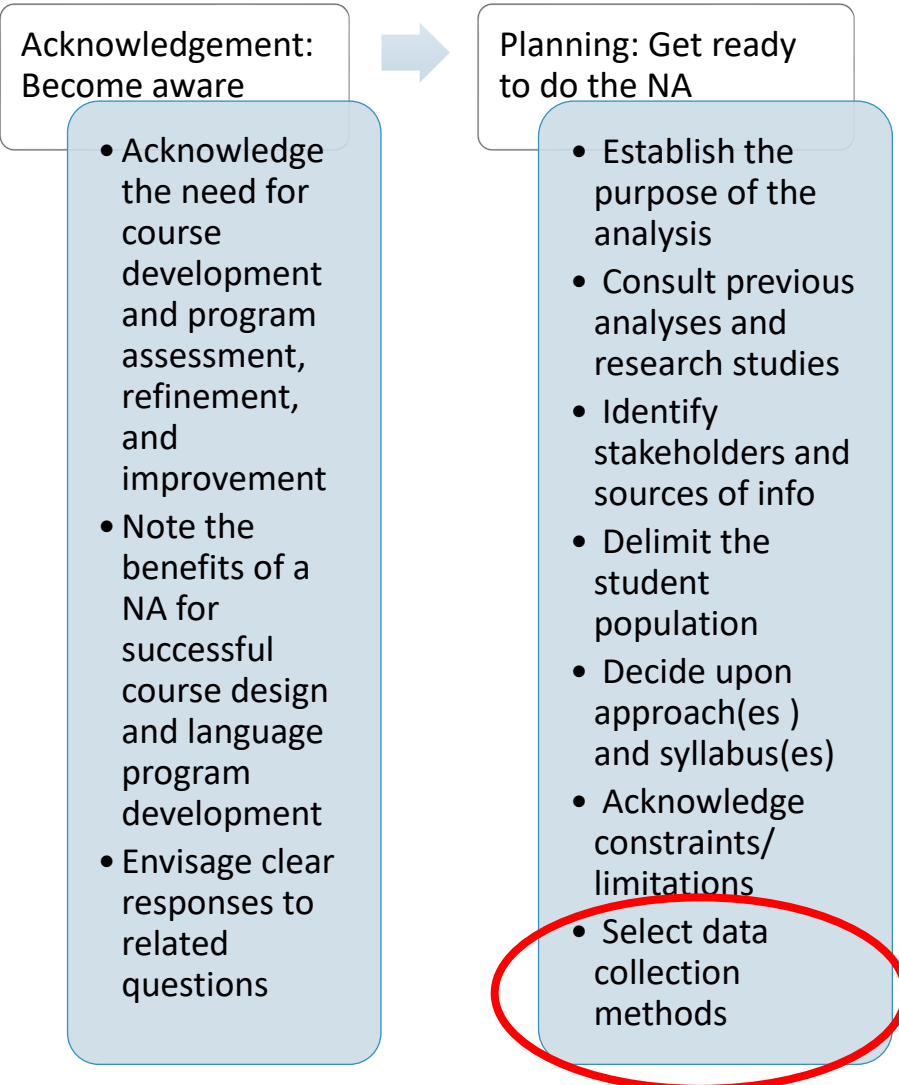
Pérez-Cañado, M. L. (2016). Teacher training needs for bilingual education: In-service perceptions. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 19(3), 266–295.



127 teacher trainers  
8 administration coordinators  
260 pre-service teachers  
241 in-service teachers

# Stages in needs analysis

*Based on discussions in Basturkmen, 2010; Bocanegra-Valle, 2025; Brown, 2009, 2016; Jordan, 1997; Serafini, Lake & Long, 2015; Woodrow, 2018.*



# How are needs analysis data collected?

For a full account of data collection procedures and examples, see

Ch. 1 in Long (2005),  
Ch. 1 in Huhta et al. (2013), and  
Ch. 3 in Brown (2016)

## Quantitative

- Surveys/Questionnaires (structured, semi-structured, large-scale)
- Tests (diagnostic, progress, final)
- Checklists

## Qualitative

- Interviews (exploratory, semi-/un-structured)
- Observation (participant, non-participant)
- Learning materials and samples
- Language-based tasks (role-plays)
- Discursive encounters
- Diaries, logs, journals
- Essays
- Case studies
- Documents (text-based analysis)
- Recordings (Visual-data analysis)
- Focus groups
- Language audits
- Intuitions (expert, non-expert)
- Field notes

Methods of inquiry and data-collection instruments in a needs analysis (Bocanegra-Valle, 2025)

# Advantages and disadvantages of

## *Structured Interviews*



- Relatively low-cost and low-effort
- Swifter to conduct and produce data
- Can be conducted orally or in written form
- Yield organized and standardised data
- Low risk of interviewer bias
- Interviewers can make sure that all questions are answered
- Comparisons can easily be drawn across informants
- Results may be generalisable



- Time-consuming (particularly if conducted orally)
- Important aspects may be neglected as a result of standardisation
- Do not allow informants room to express own ideas and own answers as a result of an interview schedule
- Some interviewees may be difficult to access

(Based on discussions in Brown, 2016; Long, 2005, and Huhta et al., 2013)

# To sum up

- ✓ Using multiple informants/sources and data-collection instruments is key for a successful needs analysis.
- ✓ Triangulation not only adds breadth and depth to the process but also enhances the validity and reliability of findings (Long, 2005).
- ✓ Questionnaires/Surveys are the most popular data-collection instrument, followed by interviews.
- ✓ Other instruments (like focus groups or document analysis) are increasingly being introduced.
- ✓ All data-collection instruments have benefits and limitations.



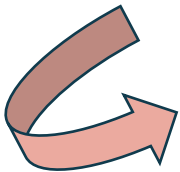
# Sample studies

Önder-Özdemir, N. (2014). Diagnosing the EAP needs of Turkish medical students: A longitudinal critical needs analysis. *Ibérica*, 28, 35–58.



Questionnaires | Interviews | Observation | Reflective journals | Student essays

Chan, C. S. C. (2018). Proposing and illustrating a research-informed approach to curriculum development for specific topics in business English. *English for Specific Purposes*, 52, 27–46.



Questionnaire survey | Observation notes | Learners' reflections | Learner language produced in role-plays | Video recordings | Audio recordings

Holden, W., & Blake, J. (2022). Development of an English for research purposes program for STEM graduate students. In G. Hill, J. Falout, & M. Apple (Eds.), *STEM English in Japan* (pp. 95–115). Palgrave Macmillan.



Documentary analysis | Questionnaires (c. 300 graduate students) | Focus-group interviews (c. 100 graduate students) | Online surveys | Observation of students in the writing lab | Secondary data sources (i.e., course syllabi for content courses, laboratory rosters, and research articles from the university research archive)

# Quick Poll ...

If you, as a language teacher, are planning to conduct a NA with the aim of redefining your language program, which data collection tools would you be using?



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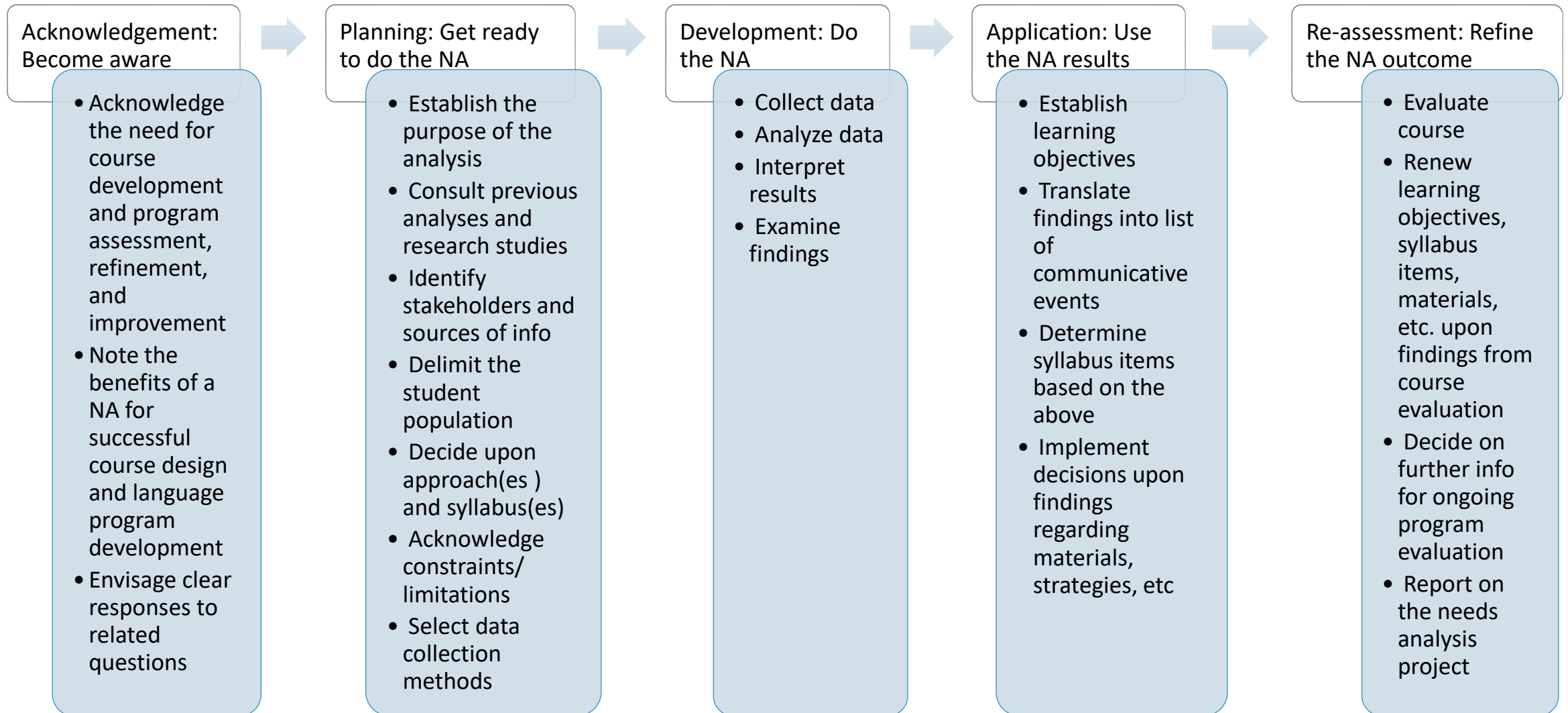
If you are planning to conduct a needs analysis with the aim of redefining your language program, which data collection tools would you be using?

68 responses



# Stages in needs analysis

*Based on discussions in Basturkmen, 2010; Bocanegra-Valle, 2025; Brown, 2009, 2016; Jordan, 1997; Serafini, Lake & Long, 2015; Woodrow, 2018.*





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from  
current  
literature

# Lessons learnt from current literature

LESSON 1: Needs may vary across educational contexts, between stakeholder groups, and over time

<i>Study</i>	<i>Context:</i> Higher Education <i>Field:</i> Business & Economics	<i>Findings:</i>
Taillefer, G. F. (2007). The professional language needs of Economics graduates: Assessment and perspectives in the French context. <i>English for Specific Purposes</i> , 26(2), 135-55.	France	English language students demand a greater focus on:  <i>Speaking and listening</i>
Prior, J. (2021). Innovative ESAP syllabus design: A means to address English-language problems in EMI programmes. In L. Mastellotto, & R. Zanin (Eds.). <i>EMI and beyond: Internationalising higher education curricula in Italy</i> (pp. 19-52). Bu,press.	Italy	<i>Speaking and writing</i>
Aizawa, I., et al. (2023). Beyond the threshold: Exploring English language proficiency, linguistic challenges, and academic language skills of Japanese students in an English medium instruction programme. <i>Language Teaching Research</i> , 27(4), 837-61.	Japan	<i>Speaking and reading</i>

# Lessons learnt from current literature

LESSON 1: Needs may vary across educational contexts, between stakeholder groups, and over time

**Huang, J. C. (2024). Unveiling EFL graduate students' EAP needs and perceptions of EAP courses: A large scale survey in Taiwan. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, 68, 101348.**

- Graduate students, master's students, and doctoral students in an EAP course in Taiwan have differing reading and writing needs.

**Martinez, A. M., & Sanz, C. (2008). Instructors' and administrators' beliefs within a Spanish LSP program. In H. J. Siskin (Ed.), *From thought to action: Exploring beliefs and outcomes in the foreign language program* (pp. 67-91). Thomson Heinle.**

- Administrators' beliefs and practices clearly contradicted students' and instructors' beliefs.



# Lessons learnt from current literature

## LESSON 2: Needs analysis informs the contents, requirements, and organization of new language programs

**Tamayo Cano. L- H., et al. (2023). Needs analysis to design an English blended learning program: Teachers' and administrators' voices. *Profile: Issues in Teachers' Professional Development*, 25(1), 193–210.**

- Attempted to identify the contextual requirements to design and implement a blended learning program in English at a Colombian public university
- Findings revealed the need:
  - to invest considerably in new personnel and e-infrastructure to support teachers, administrators and students
  - to consider students' context to design EFL blended programs
  - to offer teachers and students ICT support and methodological professional development
  - to carefully balance the integration of face-to-face and online modalities in the language program

# Lessons learnt from current literature

## LESSON 3: Needs analysis helps to evaluate and refine existing language programs

Watanabe, Y., Norris, J. M., & Gonzalez-Lloret, M. (2009). Identifying and responding to evaluation needs in college foreign language programs. In J. M. Norris, J. Davis, C. Sinicropo, & Y. Watanabe (Eds.), *Toward Useful Program Evaluation in College Foreign Language Education* (pp. 5–56). University of Hawaii, National Foreign Language Resource Center.

- Part of a research Project aimed to identify the evaluation needs of FL programs and educators in US colleges and universities
- Findings revealed current pressures and uses for evaluation, the methods deemed most effective, the components of FL programs most in need of evaluative attention and resources that help in building capacity.
- Provides implications for developing and implementing subsequent strategies to enhance program evaluation capacity among US college FL educators

# Lessons learnt from current literature

## LESSON 4: Needs analysis helps to update teaching methodologies and materials

**Nateghian, N. (2024). English language needs of Iranian students of civil engineering: Are the courses aligned with workplace needs? *English for Specific Purposes*, 76, 122–135.**

- Instructors noted a discrepancy between current textbooks and actual language use outside the classroom
- Professionals suggested exposition to examples of the genres students will be handling in real work situations
- Students should be provided with authentic course materials and simulated situations that aligned with workplace needs

# Lessons learnt from current literature

## LESSON 5: Needs analysis helps to identify lacks and mismatches in language programs

**Arias-Contreras, C., & Moore, P. J. (2022). The role of English language in the field of agriculture: A needs analysis. *English for Specific Purposes*, 65, 95–106.**

- Explored the language needs in the agricultural sector from the perspectives of industry and school (Vocational educational program in agriculture in Chile)
- Found that the content of the current syllabus for agricultural schools did not match the target situation needs of these students because:
  - neither the syllabus nor the teaching materials provided by the Chilean Ministry of Education were designed in relation to the students' occupational domain; and,
  - EFL teachers' knowledge about the students' specialization was vague

# Lessons learnt from current literature

## LESSON 6: Needs analysis reveals tensions in course planning and administration

Holden, W., & Blake, J. (2022). Development of an English for research purposes program for STEM graduate students. In G. Hill, J. Falout, & M. Apple (Eds.), *STEM English in Japan* (pp. 95–115). Palgrave Macmillan.

- Examined the role of administrators in implementing curricula at higher education institutions in Japan
- Revealed the tensions arising from using the Japanese language in an English for Research Purposes program:
  - The program administrator (a non-English-speaking non-specialist) obstructed necessary reforms
  - Resistance from the English-language teaching unit to conducting a needs analysis: the administrator impeded data collection from professors and students to maintain power
  - The administrator's intransigence concealed requirements that favoured Japanese students as primary beneficiaries of the program
- *"Guerilla needs analysis"* (p. 97)

# Lessons learnt from current literature

## LESSON 7: Needs analysis helps to identify training gaps and the need for support

**Breeze, R. (2014). Identifying needs in English-medium university courses. In R. Breeze, C. Llamas Saiz, C. Martínez Pasamar, & C. Tabernero Sala (Eds.), *Integration of Theory and Practice in CLIL* (pp. 143-59). Rodopi.**

- EMI programs should support visiting lecturers in order to promote good teaching practices
- EMI programs should address preparatory or parallel support on discipline-specific language among students attending lectures in English

**Steadman, A., & Kraut, R. (2018). Preparing the online language program administrator: A needs analysis of intensive English programs in the United States. *CALICO Journal*, 35(3), 274–93.**

- Online English language programs in the US
- Administrators need training in technology, online pedagogy/instructional design, and business/administration
- Current existing gaps in training opportunities were highlighted

# Lessons learnt from current literature

## LESSON 8: Innovative approaches to NA enhance data insights and address emerging challenges in view of more effective language program development

Lambert, C. (2010). A task-based needs analysis: Putting principles into practice. *Language Teaching Research*, 14(1), 99-112.

- Triangulated multiple data sources and methods to build a consensus on the English language **tasks** faced by graduates in their lives and careers as a practical basis for L2 program development

Khany, R., & Tarlai-Aliabadi, H. (2016). Studying power relations in an academic-setting: Teachers' and students' perceptions of EAP classes in Iran. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, 21, 72-85.

- Included a **critical (or "rights") NA** to assess the extent to which the language curriculum was shaped by students' and teachers' feedback, allowing them to make suggestions for pedagogical change

Staples, S. (2019). Using corpus-based discourse analysis for curriculum development: Creating and evaluating a pronunciation course for internationally educated nurses. *English for Specific Purposes*, 53, 13-29.

- Used **corpus-based NA** gathered from nurse-patient oral interactions to inform the creation of course materials within a pronunciation course for nurses

Huang, Q., & Yu, Q. J. (2023). Towards a communication-focused ESP course for nursing students in building partnership with patients: A needs analysis. *English for Specific Purposes*, 70, 57-69

- Adopted an **ethnographic discourse analytical approach** to analyze video-recorded role-play conversations for a specific course leading to learner-centered tailor-made language instruction

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# Key takeaways

**Why?**

To design a new course | To refine an existing course | To update learning materials | To gain insights into communicative needs at the workplace ...

**What?**

Learning needs, target needs, communicative needs, teacher needs, lacks ...

**Who?**

Students, teachers, program administrators, published sources ...

**Where?**

Primary, secondary, tertiary, vocational education, workplace

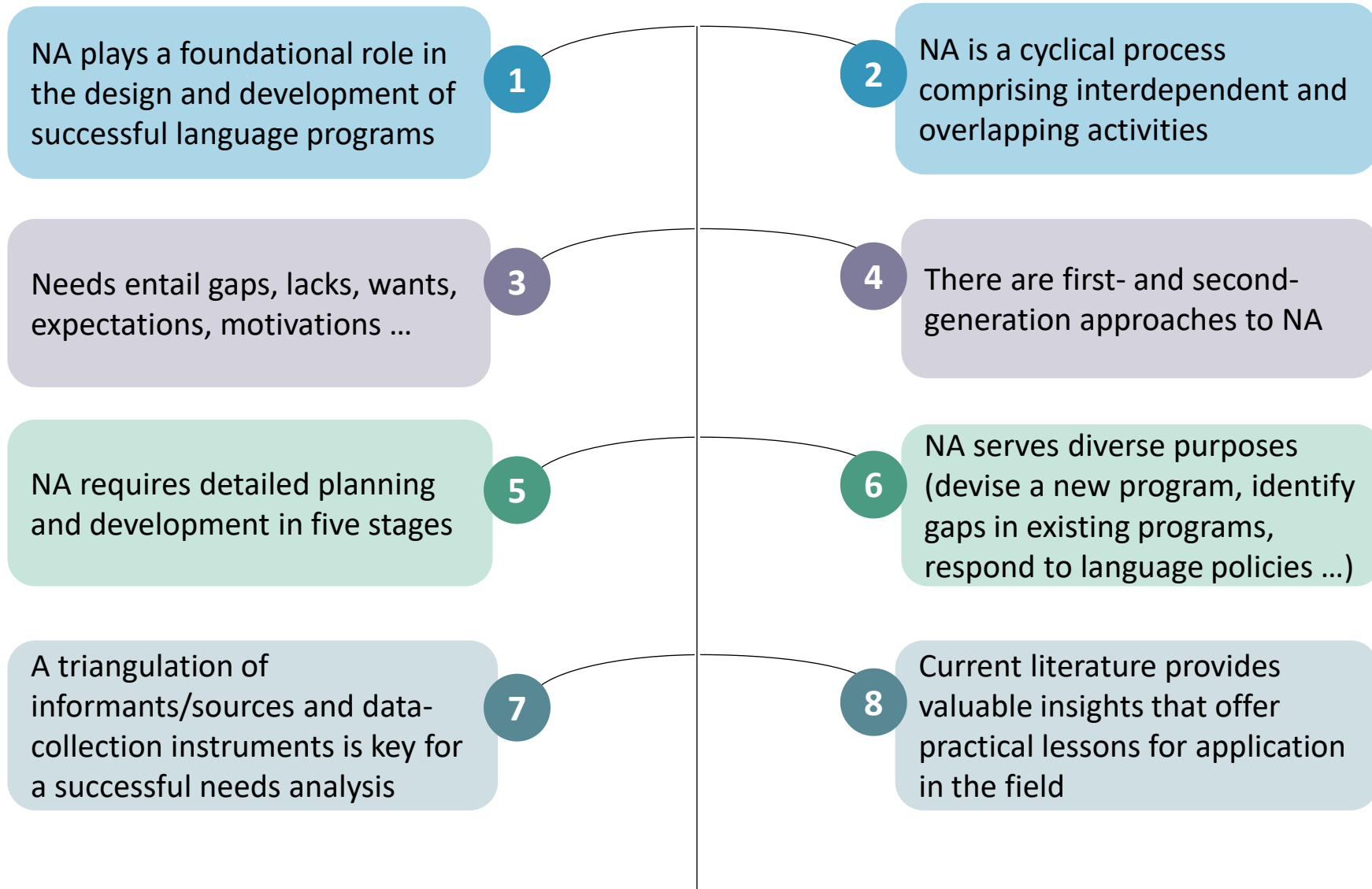
**When?**

Before, during, after the course

**How?**

Quantitative, qualitative, mixed methods, small scale, large scale

# Key takeaways



# Selected relevant references

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A word cloud of thank-you phrases in various languages. The words are arranged in a dense, overlapping manner. The largest word is 'THANKS' in cyan. Other prominent words include 'Gracias' in blue, 'Merci' in purple, 'Danke' in blue, and 'Arigato' in purple. Smaller words include 'Grazie', 'Tack', 'Dziękuję', 'Asante', 'Xie Xie', 'Obrigado', 'Kiitos', 'Mèsi', 'Tena Koe', 'MahaIo', 'Vinaka', 'Kop Khun', 'Ngiyabonga', 'Salamat', 'Sukria', 'Terima Kasih', 'Efharisto', 'Kamsahamida', 'Hvala', 'Shukran', 'Dhanyavaad', 'Spasibo', and 'Tack'. The colors used for the words include cyan, blue, purple, and magenta.

THANKS

Gracias

Merci

Danke

Arigato

Grazie

Tack

Dziękuję

Asante

Xie Xie

Obrigado

Kiitos

Mèsi

Tena Koe

MahaIo

Vinaka

Kop Khun

Ngiyabonga

Salamat

Sukria

Terima Kasih

Efharisto

Kamsahamida

Hvala

Shukran

Dhanyavaad

Spasibo

# Needs analysis and language learning: Unlocking opportunities for successful language programs



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