Construct validation of a general English language needs analysis instrument

by KUMAZAWA Takaaki (Kanto Gakuin University)

Broadly defined, needs analysis (NA) is a procedure to collect information about learners' needs (Richards, 2001). The importance of NA is emphasized in English for Specific Purpose (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987) and English for Academic Purposes (Jordan, 1997), and also in general language courses espousing learner-centered curricula (Nunan, 1988; Tudor, 1996), task-based curricula (Long & Crookes, 1992), as well as performance-assessment (Norris, Brown, Hudson, & Yoshioka, 1988).

NA is considered a crucial component of systematic curriculum development. In Brown's (1995, p. 21) systematic curriculum development model it is the first phase of an ongoing quality control process (see Figure 1). Brown (1995, p. 21) defines NA as:

the systematic collection and analysis of all relevant information necessary to satisfy the language learning requirements of the students within the context of the particular institutions involved in the learning situation.

In the initial NA phase, administrators collect and analyze information about students' needs in order to design sound, defensible objectives - which is the second phase of Brown's five-phase model depicted in Figure 1. Based on this model, the purpose of conducting NA is to systematically

gather information in order to design objectives. While goals are "general statements about what must be accomplished in order to attain and satisfy students' needs," objectives refer to "precise statements about what content or skills the students must master in order to attain a particular goal" (Brown, 1995, p. 21). Thus, objectives have to be derived from corresponding goals. Therefore, it is essential for a language program to have well-defined goals so that the subsequent evaluation instruments can

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accurately measure the extent to which students have mastered the goals. Administrators can select the goals that students feel the need to learn and extrapolate these in terms of specific objectives which represent a concrete manifestation of those goals. NA is generally administered to a particular target group of students at a program-level. For the administration to a large number of students, a questionnaire is the most frequently used and efficient method to elicit responses.

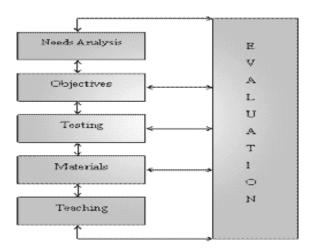


Figure 1. The systematic curriculum development model proposed by Brown (1995)

A number of articles have been published on NA such as those by Basturkmen (1998), Berwick (1989), and West (1994). However, the actual detailed studies on this topic are scarce (e.g., Iwai, Kondo, Lim, Ray, Shimizu, & Brown, 1999; Chaudron, et al., 2005). In Japanese contexts, quiet a few studies have explored variables such as students' bio data, motivation, strategies, learning beliefs, learning styles and preference, and perceived difficulty in learning (Hiromori, 2003; Kikuchi, 2005; Kuwabara, Nakanishi, & Komai, 2005; Robson & Midorikawa, 2001; and Suzuki & Kumazawa, 2006). These instruments were employed to investigate individual differences among student respondents. Especially, teachers can make use of such information to better discern characteristics of their students and subsequently making lessons more satisfying for them by addressing their needs. For instance, if students prefer working in pairs to small groups, teachers can provide more pair-work activities. However, it is often difficult to translate subjective student preferences into course objectives. One instrument that reputedly does this can be found in Busch, Elsea, Gruba, and Johnson (1992). Those authors list nine items in which the expression "need" was included in item description wordings so that respondents could specify the extent of their needs with concision (Busch et. al., 1992, p. 18). Moreover, in 2004 Kusanagi and Kumazawa made an attempt to develop and validate an NA instrument with these features. In their study, a Rasch analysis was conducted assuming that all 75 items were unidimensional. The results indicated that several items were misfitting, and the instrument lacked validity. One of the confounding factors was that many terms had a variety of ambiguous wordings which likely tapped into a number of constructs. Ideally, precise wording which taps into a single construct should be used.

Research Questions

Since the 2004 version of the NA instrument designed by Kusanagi and Kumazawa was not valid, this study sought to develop a revised NA instrument which overcame some of the limitations of the previous instrument. This version of the NA instrument, called the General English Language Needs Analysis Instrument (GELNA), will be examined in this paper. The specific research question is: To what extent is Version 1 of the GELNA valid based on confirmatory factor analyses?

Methods

The General English Language Needs Analysis Instrument (GELNA, Ver. 1)

Most of the EFL programs have an avowed common goal to improve students' English proficiency. According to the systematic curriculum model (Brown, 1995), the objectives should focus on achieving this goal. This particular instrument was developed in 2005 in two general English programs for university students with the following courses: speaking, listening, reading, writing, culture-oriented, test-preparation, and computer-assisted language learning (CALL). The GELNA has seven sections that correspond to the seven courses offered in the program studied. The items in the GELNA represent the avowed goals of the course (see Table 1). That is, this instrument was designed to measure the extent to which the overall curricular goals matched the students' perceptions of their own learning needs. The primary purpose of this instrument was not to obtain information on the students' bio data, motivation, strategies, and learning styles, but to see how congruent the curricular goals were with the avowed student needs. For each of the sections of the GELNA, two or three goals were probed through a 6-point Likert scale. Version 1 of this instrument consisted of 20 items, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. English translation of the items in the GELNA, Ver. 1

Items

Section 1: Culture-oriented Course

- 1. I need to learn concepts in cross-cultural communication such as cultural values.
- 4. I need to practice many activities that make me understand my own culture and aware of cultural differences.
- 13. I need to learn how to handle situations when I encounter cross-cultural differences.

Section 2: CALL Course

- 10. I need to practice making my homepage in English.
- 17. I need to take a class that uses authentic audio-visual materials such as videos, CDs, and audio*.
- 18. I need to take a class that uses computers for learning.

Section 3: Listening Course

- 2. I need to practice listening to be able to understand stress pattern and intonation.
- 5. I need to practice watching dramas in English in order to be able to understand the content.
- 15. I need to practice listening extensively to get the main ideas.

Section 4: Reading Course

- 3. I need to learn reading skills such as reading rapidly and getting the gist.
- 6. I need to practice reading by focusing on the grammar of English texts and translating them into Japanese.
- 7. I need to study the structures of English sentences.

Section 5: Speaking Course

- 8. I need to learn to discuss issues effectively in English.
- 12. I need to practice making a speech and presenting ideas in English.
- 16. I need to take a class in which my final grading is decided based on my score on test performance such as a speech.

Section 6: Test-preparation Course

- 19. I need to take a class where I solve many TOEIC, TOEFL, and STEP questions.
- 20. I need to learn test-taking strategies to solve problems in TOEIC, TOEFL, and STEP.

Section 7: Writing Course

- 9. I need to practice writing papers in English.
- 11. I need to practice writing business letters in English.
- 14. I need to take a class in which my final grading is decided based on the result of my paper.

The GELNA differed from the other NA instruments mentioned earlier in one major way. All avowed goals in the GELNA had the phrase "need to" clearly embedded. For instance, Item 1 could be translated as "I *need to* learn concepts in cross-cultural communication such as cultural values." Since needs, wants, and values likely pertain different constructs, by specifically stating 'need to' in each respective item statement, the GELNA attempt to avoid some of the ambiguity of earlier NA instruments.

Participants

The GELNA was administered at two private universities in Japan in July 2005. In one midranked university, 155 first-, second-, and third-year students in the English department took the test. In the general English program of that school, four kinds of courses are offered: reading, communicative grammar, computer writing skills, and test-preparation courses. The curriculum is not systematically unified. In the other high-ranked university, 32 first-year students in the economics department and 43 first-year students in the tourism department participated in this study. This proficiency-based general English program offers communication-oriented and culture-oriented courses that are well-unified, which means assigned objectives and textbooks are set for all classes. In total, 230 participants participated in this study.

Procedures

Version 1 of the GELNA was distributed to the participants in class at the end of the first semester in 2005. The distributors instructed students how to fill out the instrument, explained that the results had no consequences on their grades, and mentioned students could leave if they did not want to complete the questionnaire. However, all the students were cooperative and remained in their seats to fill out their responses. Twenty minutes to complete the instrument was allocated.

Analysis

As an initial step, descriptive statistics were examined and the necessary data screening was carried out as described in Molloy and Newfields (2005, p. 3). Eleven items were found to be skewed, but were not far apart from the acceptable range. Thus, the violation of normality did not seem to be problematic. Ten cases were excluded because they had missing values. Fourteen cases were found to be outliers and excluded. Two cases were also eliminated because the participants circled the same response for all the 20 items, suggesting that they did not complete the instrument seriously. The total number of cases used for this analysis was 204 (n = 204). The reliability for the GELNA was checked using Cronbach alpha. For validation, a confirmatory factor analysis was carried out because the GELNA hypothetically had seven sections. Maximum likelihood was used as the parameter estimation technique. The p-value was set at .05. SPSS and AMOS were used for the analyses.

Results

Table 2 shows the descriptive statistics. The mean scores suggest that the participants felt that CALL and writing courses were the least needed. Conversely, culture-oriented, listening, and test-preparation courses were considered the most needed. Notice that the mean for Item 2 was the highest. The participants strongly felt that they needed to practice listening to be able to understand the stress and intonation accurately. The item with the least needed rating was learning how to make a homepage in English.

Factor patterns are displayed in Table 2 as well as in Figure 2. Figure 2 shows the result of the confirmatory factor analysis model. Squares indicate observable variables which are, in this case, items from the GELNA. Ovals represent latent variables or factors that are theoretical constructs. The single-headed arrows from the ovals and squares are called paths. The path coefficients signify the degree of causality between observable and latent variables. In a confirmatory factor analysis model, these path coefficients can be interpreted as factor patterns that are like factor loadings. In exploratory factor analysis they show the relationship between observable and latent variables. The double-headed arrows between two latent variables are like correlation coefficients. The small circles attached to observable variables are errors inherent in the items. The factor patterns are moderate or high, ranging from .41 to .99. Notice that Item 5 was excluded in Figure 2 because the factor pattern was lower than .30 in the initial run for a confirmatory factor analysis. The fit indices indicate the degree of adequacy of a model to the data. The χ^2 was significant, and the GFI, AGFI, CFI, and RMSEA were .89, .84, .92, and .07, respectively. These results showed that the model was fairly adequate.

The sectional Cronbach alpha internal consistency coefficients were moderate or high, ranging from .44 to .96. The number of items within each section was small but it was still reliable except for Section 3. The coefficient for the 19-item GELNA was high at .87. In addition, the coefficient for the data set without the data screening (n = 231) was also .87.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics for Version 1 of the GELNA (n = 204)

Table 2. Descriptive statistics for version 1 of the GLLNA $(n-207)$							
Item #	Items	M	SD	Factor			
Pattern							
Section 1: Culture-oriented Course ($\alpha = .76$)							
1.	I need to learn concepts in cross-cultural communication such as cultural values. 4.69						.74
4.	I need to practice many activities that make me understand my own culture						
	and aware of cultural differences.					1.08	.77
13.	I need to learn how to handle situations when I encounter cross-cultural differences. 4.56					1.01	.65
Section 2: CALL Course ($\alpha = .63$)							
10.	I need learn how to make a web page in English. 3.07					1.24	.65
17.	I need to take a class that uses real audio-visual materials such as videos, CDs, and audio. 4.87					1.02	.47
18.	I need	to take a	class tha	it uses computers for learning. 3.96 1.14 .71			
Section 3: Listening Course ($\alpha = .44$)							
2.	I need	to practi	ce listeni	ng to be able to understand stress pattern and intonation.	5.08	0.90	.41
5.	I need to practice watching dramas in English in order to be able to understand the content. 4.69					1.04	*
15.	I need	to practi	ce listeni	ng extensively to get the main ideas.	4.75	0.98	.70
Section 4: Reading Course ($\alpha = .65$)							
3.	I need	to learn	reading s	kills such as reading rapidly and getting the gist.	4.64	0.90	.48
6.				g by focusing on the grammar of English texts and			
	transla	ting ther	n into Ja _l	panese.	3.79	1.12	.80
7.	I need	to study	the struc	tures of English sentences.	3.95	1.00	.61
Section 5: Speaking Course ($\alpha = .80$)							
8.	I need	to learn	to discus	s issues effectively in English.	4.33	1.20	.76
12.	I need	to practi	ce makin	g a speech and presenting ideas in English.	4.42	1.20	.80
16.	I need	to take a	class in	which my final grading is decided based on my score			
	on test	perform	ance sucl	h as a speech.	4.14	1.07	.71
Section 6: Test-preparation course ($\alpha = .96$)							
19.	I need	to take a	class wh	ere I solve many TOEIC, TOEFL, and STEP questions.	4.81	1.16	.93
20.	I need	to learn	test-takin	g strategies to solve problems in TOEIC, TOEFL, and STEP.	4.81	1.19	.99
Section 7: Writing Course (α= .64)							
9.	I need	to practi	ce writin	g papers in English.	4.12	1.17	.77
11.	I need to practice writing business letters in English. 3.71					1.29	.67
14.	I need	to take a	class in	which my final grading is decided based on the result of my paper	er. 4.11	1.05	.41

Note: *Item 5 was excluded because the factor pattern was below .30 in the initial run for a confirmatory factor analysis. The reliability for the remaining 19 items was .87. The items are based on a 6-point Likert scale.

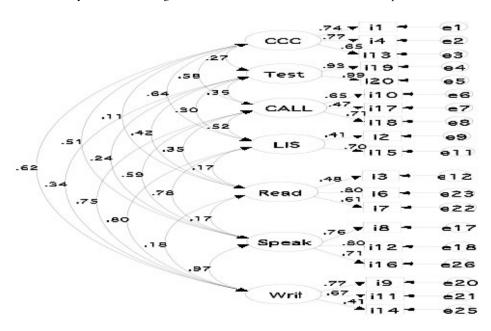


Figure 2. A confirmatory factor analysis model for Version 1 of the GELNA

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine the construct validity of the first version of the GELNA. As a result of these analyses, it was found that except one section, the rest of the instrument had moderate to high reliability coefficients. The coefficient for the entire instrument was also high. The factor patterns were moderate to high. Also, the confirmatory factory analysis model showed an adequate fit with the data. Taken together, these results seem to justify the construct validity of the GELNA.

Although there is statistical support for the construct validity of the GELNA, it is also important that content validity issues be addressed. In the process of this evaluation, four possible adjustments on the GELNA are discussed: (a) negative questions, (b) target culture, (c) specific statements, and (d) double-barreled questions. In general, negative or double-negative questions should be avoided because they can lead to misinterpretation or confusion (Brown, 2001, p. 47). However, it might be reasonable to include negative questions. In the GELNA, almost all of the questions were worded in such a way to make it sound like all the goals were needed for students' learning. This might lead to an expectancy effect resulting in unnaturally high scores, so including some statements countersuggestive of the goals might reduce any expectancy effect (Dörnyei, 2003). In this study, the data from two respondents were excluded because they circled the same response throughout the survey. To detect students who might be randomly circling responses, negative questions can be used to see if their reverse coded responses to negatives questions are the same as their responses to the corresponding positive questions.

In Items 1, 4, and 13 about cross-cultural difference, the target countries were broadly set as foreign countries (Jp. *takoku*), so the target countries were needed to be specified. When many young Japanese hear the words such as *takoku* or *kokusai* they think of the North America and Western Europe, but there are actually over 192 countries in the world: many of outside of those regions. Japanese might be willing to learn about the cultures of some countries, but not others. This can be easily fixed by replacing *takoku* to terms such as North America or a specific country.

Goals are general statements of the program's purpose, and the items in the GELNA should not be too specific. However, there are some minor ambiguities in the instrument which need to be addressed. For example, Item 2 did not specify which language the statement pertained to. Japanese university students might infer that it was about English, but the matter should be more clearly stated.

Moreover, Item 7 about learning structure of English sentences is general. Once again Japanese university students might infer that it was about learning grammatical structure of English sentences. However, it could mean learning the organizational structure of English essays.

Double-barreled questions ask two or more questions simultaneously (Brown, 2001, p. 49) and should be avoided to interpret accurately. For instance, Item 19 of Version 1 of the GELNA asked if the respondents felt they needed to take a class focusing on the TOEIC, TOEFL, or STEP. This item essentially asks three questions at the same time. Some respondents might have felt they need to take the TOEFL, but not the STEP. Such questions tend to confuse the respondents and confound the results.

Conclusion

In developing a general language curriculum systematically, needs analysis instruments such as the GELNA may be useful especially in developing sound, defensible goals. Some institutions might prefer to tailor the GELNA to suit their particular goals. Although the GELNA is certainly not the only needs analysis tool, the fact that it was developed in a Japanese university setting might make it particularly useful to English educators in Japanese universities.

Based on the discussions about the content validity issues, a revised form of the GELNA has been developed and appears in Appendix 2. This version differs from the original version in the following ways: (1), including negative coded questions (2), avoiding double-barreled questions, (3) making more specific statements.

The areas for further research include the following questions: (1) How do students' responses to the revised GELNA differ from those to the original version?, and (2) To what extent can the reliability and construct validity of the revised GELNA be improved? It is hoped that these questions be examined further to overcome the limitations of the GELNA.

Acknowledgement

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Appendix 1: Version 1 of the GELNA

英語の授業に対するニーズ調査

下記の質問は皆さんが必要だと思う英語の技能や、英語の授業全般に対してどのようなニーズを持っている かを調査するものです。成績等とは一切関係はなく、 皆さんがなにを大学の英語の授業に求めているかを 明確にするためのものです。

回答方法は以下のとおりです。

- 1. このアンケートには正解、誤答などはありません。皆さんの率直な意見に基づいて自分に当てはまると ころにo印を塗りつぶして下さい。
- 2. 回答は該当する番号にきちんとo印を塗りつぶして下さい。その際できるだけ B か HB の鉛筆を用い、 はっきりと濃く○を塗りつぶして下さい。
- 3. それぞれの質問に1つだけoを塗りつぶして下さい。
- 4. それぞれの質問には6つ選択肢があり必要性の度合いを表します。

- (6) 非常に必要である(5) 必要である(4) まあ必要である(3) あまり必要ではない(2) 必要ではない(1) まったく必要で
- (1) まったく必要ではない

- 5. 回答後考え直し、回答を変えたい時は、最初のo印を完全に消してから回答しなおしてください。 充実 した英語の授業を提供するためのものです。どうかご協力をお願い致します。
 - 1 文化的価値観など異文化コミュニケーシ・ンにおける概念を学習する必要がある。
 - 2 発音、イントネーション、音の強勢パターン Ltけるようになる練習をする必要がある。
 - 3 速読や大意把握のための読み方を・につける練習をする必要がある。
 - 4 自国文化の理解を深め他国との相違を考える練習をする必要がある。
 - 5 英語のドラマを鑑賞して内容・理解する練習は必要である。
 - 6 英語のテキストを文法や訳などを中心に細か ュ読み取る練習をする必要がある。
 - 7 英語で書かれた文章の構造に ツいて学習する必要がある。
 - 8 英語で効果的に討論する 網 K をする必要がある。
 - 9 英語でレポートを書く・習をする必要がある。
 - 10 英語でホームページを作成・る練習をする必要がある。
 - 11 英語でビジネスレターを書ュ練習をする必要がある。
 - 12 英語でスピーチや発表をする練習は必要である。
 - 13 異文化に接したときにどのように対処・ればいいのかを学習する必要がある。
 - 14 レポートの結果を評価に入・る授業を必要としている。
 - 15 まとまった内容の英語を聞き要点を理 はるような練習をする必要がある。
 - 16 プレゼンテーションなどによる実技テストの級ハを評価に入れる授業を必要としている。
 - 17 ビデオ、CD、オーディオテープのような視聴 o 教材を使用する授業を必要としている。
 - 18 コンピューターを使用した英黷7授業を必要としている。
 - 19 TOEIC、TOEFLや英検の問題を解く実・練習をする必要がある。
 - 20 TOEIC、TOEFLや英検の問題を解くための攻ェ方法を学習する必要がある。

Appendix 2: Version 2 of the GELNA

英語の授業に対するニーズ調査

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- 3. それぞれの質問に1つだけoを塗りつぶして下さい。

- 4. それぞれの質問には6つ選択肢があり必要性の度合いを表します。
 - (6) 非常に必要である (5) 必要である
- (4) まあ必要である

- (3) あまり必要ではない
- (2) 必要ではない
- (1) まったく必要ではない
- 5. 回答後考え直し、回答を変えたい時は、最初のo印を完全に消してから回答しなおしてください。 充実 した英語の授業を提供するためのものです。どうかご協力をお願い致します。
 - 1 北米の文化的価値観など異文化コミュニケー V ョンにおける概念を学習する必要がある。
 - 2 発音、イントネーション、音の強勢パターン L#けるようになる練習をする必要がある。
 - 3 速読や大意把握のための読み方を・につける練習をする必要がある。
 - 自国文化の理解を深め他国との相違 を考える練習をする必要がある。 4
 - 5 英語のドラマを鑑賞して内容・理解する練習は必要である。
 - 6 英語のテキストを文法や訳などを中心に細かュ読み取る練習をする必要がある。
 - 7 英語で書かれた文章の構造にツいて学習する必要がある。
 - 8 英語で効果的に討論する 網 K をする必要がある。
 - 9 英語でレポートを書く・習をする必要がある。
 - 英語でホームページを作成・る練習をする必要がある。 10
 - 11 英語でビジネスレターを書ュ練習をする必要がある。
 - 12 英語でスピーチや発表をする練習は必要である。
 - 13 異文化に接したときにどのように対処・ればいいのかを学習する必要がある。
 - 14 レポートの結果を評価に入・る授業を必要としている。
 - 15 まとまった内容の英語を聞き要点を理よるような練習をする必要がある。
 - プレゼンテーションなどによる実技テストの級^を評価に入れる授業を必要としている。 16
 - 17 ビデオ、CD、オーディオテープのような視聴o教材を使用する授業を必要としている。
 - レポートの結果を評価に入・る授業を必要としている。 18
 - 19 まとまった内容の英語を聞き要点を理よるような練習をする必要がある。
 - プレゼンテーションなどによる実技テストの級ハを評価に入れる授業を必要としている。 20
 - ビデオ、CD、オーディオテープのような視聴の教材を使用する授業を必要としている。 21
 - コンピューターを使用した英黷7授業を必要としている。 22
 - TOEIC の実践問題を練習する必要がある。 23
 - 24 TOEFL の実践問題を練習する・要性は感じられない。
 - 25 TOEIC の問題を解くための攻略方 @を学習する必要がある。
 - 26 TOEFL の問題を解くための攻略方 @を学習する必要はない。