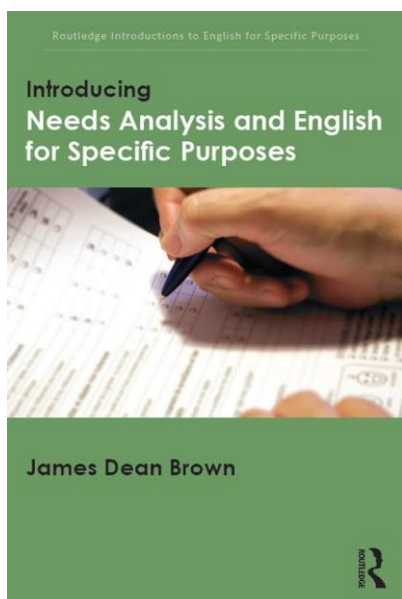# BOOK REVIEW

TRAJECTORIES OF NEEDS ANALYSIS FOR EFFECTIVE CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT

James Dean Brown. INTRODUCING NEEDS ANALYSIS AND ENGLISH FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES (2016), New York: Routledge. 231 pp., ISBN-978-1-138-80381-7 (PBK).

Needs analysis (NA) is a "cornerstone" for curriculum development to identify learners' needs across disciplines, professions and workplaces (Basturkmen, 2010; Bocanegra-Valle, 2016; Brown, 1995; Long, 2005; Önder-Özdemir, 2018). James Dean Brown's valuable book is a useful, up-to-date reference which has effectively embedded both theory and practice in the context of NA.

In his preface, Brown relates to previously published literature to explain that this volume has been written after a review of many books on second language curriculum development, NA and English for specific purposes (ESP) that contain sections on NA, or books that focus on NA in general education.

The book elucidates the "trajectories" of NA in ESP in seven chapters organised in three parts. One of its strengths is that, while introducing NA, all the steps of the process are described in detail, even data collection and analysis procedures. Thus, this title is valuable not only because of its contribution to the existing NA literature but also because of the methodological descriptions for conducting an effective NA. It is notable that each chapter begins with a set of questions. These are answered throughout the chapter and serve to map the expected content. Each chapter ends with a summary and conclusion part.

Part I, *Getting ready to do an ESP needs analysis*, contains three chapters. In Chapter 1, "Defining needs analysis in English for Specific Purposes (ESP)", Brown draws attention to terms and definitions, and questions what "needs" and "analysis" refer to in NA. He defines two salient terms, NA and ESP, concisely and with a critical eye, and argues that needs could be used as a synonym for "*wants, desires, necessities, lacks, gaps, expectations, motivations, deficiencies, requirements, requests, prerequisites, essentials*" (p. 13, original emphasis). To him, a straightforward definition of NA is "the systematic collection and analysis of all information necessary for defining and validating a defensible curriculum" (p. 4). He explains three key concepts in NA: "stakeholders", a "defensible curriculum", and "necessary information" and, together with the definition of ESP, goes on to discuss different types of ESP and how specific they should be.

Brown coins the term "needs viewpoints" by considering different needs from different stakeholders, and suggests four types of needs viewpoints drawing on his own previous research published in 2009, West (1994) and Jordan (1997): "democratic view" (whatever most people want), "discrepancy view" (whatever is missing), "analytic view" (whatever logically comes next), and "diagnostic view" (whatever will do most harm if missing). Readers interested in types of needs analyses should read this chapter because it contains a detailed account of eleven analysis options that could be used on their own or in combination: "target-situation use analyses", "target-situation linguistic analyses", "target-situation learning analyses", "present-situation analyses", "gap analyses", "individual-differences analyses", "rights analyses", "classroom-learning analyses", "classroom-teaching analyses", "means analyses" and "language audits".

The second chapter in this section, "Focusing the ESP needs analysis", provides useful information regarding the scale of an NA as based on how broad or narrow an NA should be – that is, in terms of local or international level, and specificity. The subsection "Constraints on ESP NA" thoroughly discusses various constraints which have been insufficiently dealt with in the previous literature; thus, novice researchers and ESP needs analysts will find this part informative enough to familiarise themselves with the potential challenges they may encounter while carrying out an NA.

After reporting the features of a successful and satisfying NA, the third chapter, "Selecting and sequencing ESP needs analysis data collection procedures", provides comprehensive and insightful aspects for 32 data collection procedures (see Table 3.1 on pages 65-67) with their definitions in an NA. Some examples are expert intuitions, records analysis, advisory review, opinions surveys or interest group. One of the highlights of this chapter is the discussion of strategies for combining and sequencing multiple procedures and case studies.

Part II, *Doing the ESP needs analysis*, contains two chapters. Chapter 4, "Collecting ESP needs analysis data", highlights the significance of methods of data collection to make the NA results credible and sound given the ongoing concerns with the reliability and validity of the NA (see also Önder-Özdemir, 2018; Serafini,

Lake, & Long, 2015). This chapter takes the form of a very informative research methodology part focusing on the strategies for NA data collection processes and activities (e.g. interviews and questionnaires) with the intention of enhancing the trustworthiness of the NA outcomes. I should note that some researchers like Hyland (2006) criticises questionnaires for being overused in NA at the expense of collecting authentic texts. In this chapter, Brown addresses this gap; however, he mainly focuses on data gathered from recordings of oral interactions, conversations as well as the Internet (including websites and corpora). Yet, in my view, some information on gathering and analysing authentic sample materials, such as the documents a health care provider or a waiter needs to fill out in their work life, could have also been explored.

Chapter 5, "Analysing and interpreting ESP needs analysis data", draws attention to analysing, presenting and interpreting NA quantitative and qualitative data. Interestingly, this chapter explains some concepts that are relevant to statistical analyses, like standard deviation, and unlike most of the published work on NA, it also introduces specific computer software tools to analyse ESP NA corpora. Drawing on his personal experience, Brown places emphasis on "triangulation" as an important tool for the analysis of NA data and lists nine types of triangulation (i.e., stakeholder, method, location, time, perspective, investigator, theory, interdisciplinary, and participant-role).

Part III, *Using the needs analysis results*, contains two chapters. Chapter 6, "Using the NA results in the rest of the ESP curriculum", reports how to employ the results of NA effectively. Brown's focus on student learning outcomes (SLOs) and using SLOs while interpreting NA results are noteworthy as they could work as a bridge among curriculum elements. After defining SLOs and its types (more precisely, defined, embedded, and experiential SLOs), Chapter 6 echoes outcome-based education (see Spady, 1994). Notably, this chapter is useful for teachers because it suggests concise words and sample structures to write a professional SLO while preparing a course syllabus.

In chapter 7, "Reporting on the ESP needs analysis project", Brown shares his experience about report writing by providing practical information regarding the organisation and writing of an NA report. The tips in this last chapter could be particularly beneficial to post-graduate students and researchers who are conducting research on NA. It is striking, however, to read about "the inutility of the notion of *truth* in needs analyses" (p. 207) and how the options (approaches and syllabuses) that are available, and the opinions of the different groups of stakeholders, including students, teachers and employers, all contribute to recognising that there is "no single truth" and that the goal is a "defensible curriculum" (p. 207).

Readers who are familiar with Brown's books know that the language he uses is reader-friendly and easy-to-understand, and that key messages are accompanied by a series of snapshots, practical applications and advice from the real world. In my view, as a young ESP researcher, this is the best reference book on NA

published so far and I strongly recommend it. It provides useful, valuable and practical information by defining key terms, reviewing the key issues drawing on the relevant studies on NA, and supporting each content addressed with figures and tables where needed. I should note that particularly chapters 4 and 5 make an insightful, detailed contribution to NA data collection and analysis processes. ESP pre-service and in-service teachers, ESP curriculum developers, and any language researcher working on NA will find in this volume the guiding light they need for conducting their needs analyses effectively and professionally.

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